

of *Daniel Deronda*, a text highly prized by semioticians, is determined in a rather similar way. Deronda saves a poor Jewish girl, develops an intense interest in the culture of the Jews, and is accepted by them as a kindred spirit. Then he finds out that he actually is a Jew. The author wants the story both ways. On the one hand this commitment must have the freedom of moral choice, otherwise the tale would lack the high-minded force of its specification; on the other, he has to be a Jew in order to become one. Culler finds this double logic a paradigm of every good narrative; an apparently free sequence of facts or events is also predetermined by the needs of the thematic structure. We find out what happened because it was necessary that it should have happened. Stand this awareness on its head and you get something like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where the reader is apparently offered a choice between two sequences of event, both of which are in fact predetermined by the plan of the novel.

We have here an obvious truth that is also a tautology; of course the events in a tale occur because the teller has willed them. But the sin of semiotics is to attempt to destroy our sense of the truth in fiction. There must be in it, as Merleau-Montaigne said of poems, "a place for the genuine". Imaginary gardens with real toads in them. Fiction must lose its nerve if those toads are signs like the story, and as subject to the story-teller's whim. And the reader will lose his interest, for he will not believe the fiction if he cannot accept the fact, or if he is told that the fact is merely a part of the fiction. This happens more and more today in "factual" novels like the recent concoction of Truman Capote, and may make us feel that a very much more important distinction for a fiction than the formalist one of Story and Discourse is the difference between what is true in it and what is made up.

Command performances

By C. H. Sisson

NICK RUSSEL

Poets by Appointment.
Britalia's Laureates.
201pp. Poole: Blandford Press.
£5.95.
0 7137 1161 2

Nick Russel has had the excellent idea of putting together a volume containing specimens of the work of Poets Laureate writing as such, with a general introduction and introductions to each of the poets included. He has done his work with a light heart, but not so light that he has not taken the trouble to collect a useful amount of biographical information about his subjects and about the procedures surrounding the laureateship itself. The tone of his contributions is brisk and readable. At worst they are sometimes a trifle repetitive and the critical orientation is more than a little uncertain. But there are plenty of critics, and there is no one else who has collected this material so neatly and found a publisher who would present it so agreeably.

The volume starts with Dryden, the first poet to be regularly appointed to the office of laureate. One might regret that Russel has omitted Ben Jonson and Deighton, in respect of whom the arrangements were less formal, but it is with the formal office and the performance of its holders that he is concerned. He says rather discouragingly of Dryden that "few people today read him much for pleasure", which is true only in the sense that a taste for his older literature is in general less widespread than it might be. He is right, however, so far as the ordinary non-reader and half-reader is concerned. In suggesting that "nineteenth-century writers still personally the age's poet".

Comparing with the succession of English poets at large, most of the laureates cut a very glacial figure. Indeed there is a case for saying that

In a good story, truth precedes fiction and remains separable from it. The fiction is manipulated by the author in any way convenient, but what is inside it must begin and remain true. The truth about Baker Street and the pair of friends who live there both precedes and enhances the fantasy of the Sherlock Holmes adventures. The success of *The Wind in the Willows* depends on the real human nature of the fantasy animals. This is a cliché, but the insistence of semiotic theorists on a tautology makes it worth emphasizing. Its importance is taken for granted by Hardy and Dickens when they take very seriously the question of how they should have ended their novels - *Great Expectations*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*. The ending must not be predetermined by the requirements of the novel but must be true to the characters and their situation. Fiction must not only defer to truth but must recognize its own status in regard to it. It is a bad thing, said Tolstoy, when characters are made to do what is not in their nature. But in the critical philosophy of today the novelist owns truth and nature as much as he owns his fictions.

It is easy to give examples of this. Criticism used to point out the kinds of truth that fiction contained. In his notes on Shakespeare's plays, Johnson thought it worthwhile to chide the playgoers of his time for finding it implausible and arbitrary that Othello and Desdemona should be made to fall in love. "Whoever ridicules this account of the progress of love shows his ignorance not only of his story but of nature and manners". But it would be irrelevant to ask whether the love of the French Lieutenant's woman is true in the same sense that Desdemona's is. Like the author's Victorian history she is a part of the fiction, and will behave in any way that is consonant with it. In Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man* it is clearly not "true" that the studious English

teacher would succumb instantly to the hero's advances, but the author requires him to seduce her and that is the end of the matter. In the many reviews of the novel there was at no point being untrue to "nature and manners".

The ways in which this theory of literature removes the truth/fiction distinction seem to me crucial. Semiology probably has nothing against truth as such but does not consider it an appropriate concept for the scrutiny and discussion of literary effect. Literature, Culler suggests, should be read not in terms of truth and invention but of "act", acts of "persuasion, narrative, trope, rhetoric". The strategies of semiotics and deconstruction are also those that "Nietzsche employed in his analyses of cause and effect as a metonymy, of truth as metaphor whose metaphoricality has been forgotten, and of the identity principle as a rhetorical imposition, a synecdoche". The nature of things and people is translated into a verbal terminology, where by implication it is no longer responsible to its counterpart in experience.

So in theory, at least, Culler is right that "poetics" and "interpretation" are two different things; for the latter depends on a continual appeal to experience, to direct impressions of life made visible in literature. The worst service that semiology has done is not to our appreciation of literature, to which it can be a useful adjunct, but to literature itself. It cannot harm past literature but it can and does contaminate our present literary environment. A creative writer unconsciously must be in a bad way. Such a writer might reply that at the present time we do not know what is "true" any more, and that he expresses this by making up a sign language that defers only to others like it. But that is hardly a convincing defence.

Cecil Day-Lewis as "a significant break with tradition", for surely he was a typical, fashionable literary man of his generation. Russel quotes Betjeman's characteristically modest and ironic words on his own appointment, to the effect that he was pleased to be the successor of Tennyson, Wordsworth and Bridges "but not quite so pleased to be the successor of Alfred Austin". "I am sure", Betjeman added, "I wrote some good poetry. I have been reading his work looking for it."

What of the future? Anything could happen, depending on who is in what places at the time. In this the future will resemble the past. Nick Russel says ingeniously: "Many poets have now come down, and poetry, no longer the exclusive property of an élite, is a national asset." So we may fear the worst. Perhaps there should be an advisory panel with representatives from the TUC and CBI, UNESCO, the World Council of Churches, the Arts Council, the Poetry Centre and, of course, Private Eye.

The Spring/Summer 1981 issue of *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* (389pp, published by the Poetry Society, 205 W. New York, N.Y. 10024. Annual subscription \$12 for individuals, \$15 for libraries) contains several reviews of poetry in translation: Ross Feld on Anne Hyde Greer's translation of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*; Katherine Washburn and Margaret Guillemin on Michael Hamburger's translations from Paul Celan; John Bayley on Joseph Brodsky's *A Part of Speech*; Jonathan Aaron on several recent volumes of translations; Polish; Helene de Aquilar on translations from Federico Garcia Lorca and Jorge Guillén. Other articles include "A Poet and Poem" on Marina Tsvetayeva by Joseph Brodsky, "The Binding Power of Words" by Judith Gleason, "Poetry in Translation: Literary Imperialism, or Defending the Muck Ox" by Tess Gallagher and "Pale Darkened Moon" by Michael Heller. Peter Schickel reviews thirteen small press publications.

I cannot make out why Russel should regard the appointment of



Utrillo's painting in oil on wood of "Le Clown Charley Mayer" (1926) is one of 125 illustrations, including forty-eight colour plates, in the magnificently produced *Utrillo* (159pp, Thames and Hudson, £16. 0 500 09151 X) which includes an analysis of this tragic, alcoholic painter's work by Alfred Werner.

The positional style

By Keith Walker

ERIC ROTHSTEIN

Restoration and Eighteenth-century Poetry 1660-1780.
242pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15.95.
0 7100 0660 8

The greatest and most entertaining history of Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry was the first Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* with which this third volume of the Routledge History of English Poetry only occasionally suggests points of comparison and contrast. Of Dryden, Johnson wrote "in 1757 he published *The Fleecy*, his greatest poetical work, of which I will not suppress a ludicrous story... If modern critics allow themselves this sort of thing, where will it in the future place at the time. In this the future will resemble the past. Nick Russel says ingeniously: "Many poets have now come down, and poetry, no longer the exclusive property of an élite, is a national asset." So we may fear the worst. Perhaps there should be an advisory panel with representatives from the TUC and CBI, UNESCO, the World Council of Churches, the Arts Council, the Poetry Centre and, of course, Private Eye.

His purpose is not to entertain, but to provide a proper frame for a sympathetic, or at least intelligent, reading of poetry of the period 1660-1780. The dense, rather severe prose, bristling with direction posts (some of which we were warned not to take too seriously) and intermittently enlivened by metaphors from cooking, suggests that Rothstein has an audience of his fellow scholars in mind. There are few enthusiasms evident beyond those for Prior's *Alma*, and the poems of Macpherson.

In the central chapter on "Style", Rothstein puts forward the view that we should read this largely unmetaphorical body of verse as an example of "positional style" (the illegitimate placing of an object within a context). This approach, and his analyses along this line, makes him alert to such relationships as those between poem, speaker, perceiver and perceived objects, and also to those between poem and tradition. A

theme explored in a second central chapter on "the uses of the past".

Two surrounding chapters survey, usually by generic movement, the poems of 1660-1720 and 1720-1780. Those of the first period are treated loosely as the "poetry of power"; those of the second as the "poetry of sympathy or fellow-feeling" (I am ignoring minor subdivisions). Milton does not figure in the first period, although his greatest works were published then. The aim of the Routledge History of English Poetry, says the General Editor, "is not to provide merely another account of the major figures", which means in practice that Dryden (especially), Swift and Pope tend to get overpowered by a treatment which directs us to many poets considered too minor even for mention in the capacious history volumes in the *History of English Literature*. The reader experiences a sense of giddiness on coming across mention in a single paragraph (the theme of happiness is in question) of poems by (among others) John Bland, Giles Jacob, John Duocan, Martin de la Gardia and George Meen. Rothstein's book dwivides explicitly to a catalogue in a long appendix where poems are briefly noted year by year and the critical comment dwindles to nil. Still, no doubt it can be useful for someone to know what sort of poetry was being written in a given year without the bother of reading it.

Rothstein's analyses are sometimes overstructured, for example on *The Rape of the Lock* where Pope's delicate moral relationships are relentlessly flattened by the critical machine. (Rothstein recognizes this when he is charting the "context of analogy and contrast" in Smart's *Song to David* and cites the quail as a counter for "cowardice".)

The method has its successes, too. There is a helpful account of the interrelationships of Collins's *Odes*, and a brilliant analysis of part of Book I of *The Dunciad*, as well as many illuminating *obiter dicta* such as Rothstein's speculations about how contemporaries might have read eighteenth-century verse. (They probably skipped.) I'm glad to see, as follows Irvin Ehrenpreis in expressing scepticism about the elaborate, scholars have faded in (say) Pope's poetry, noting how very obvious were the allusions the poets chose to signal.

ANDREA DWORCKIN

Pornography
Men Possessing Women
304pp. The Women's Press. £4.75.
0 7043 3876 9

SUSAN GRIFFIN

Pornography and Silence
Culture's Revenge Against Nature
277pp. The Women's Press. £4.75.
0 7043 3877 7

A male reader is bound to feel at a loss on tackling these two products of the American Women's Liberation Movement. They are clearly not addressed to a male audience, and especially not to the average, liberal English male who, for as long as he can remember, has been familiar with, and sympathetic to, the cause of women's rights. They make no pretence of being objective analyses of the modern phenomenon of commercial pornography. They are relying calls or war-cries intended only for other women. Their authors are Amazons or female chauvinists. If women, who after all are said to be in the majority, were to respond to their urgent plea, men would sooner or later be bred only on a quota system, for the replenishment of the sperm-bank. And this would be simple justice, because man have wronged dominated culture from the beginning, men are tyrants, men are all examples of sheer, amoral sex-drive, men understand neither women nor themselves, men are destroying the world, man, by implication, do not deserve to exist.

True, commercialized pornography is a dubious development, and things in general can always be said to be bad, but why should men, as men, be attacked with such vehemence at this stage? Female emancipation has been in progress for at least a century in Europe. In England, the mutation towards a classless society as between men and women - in so far as it is feasible, given their statistically different propensities - is surely well advanced, when we have a woman Prime Minister, woman in all the professions, and laws against sex-discrimination. America must be lagging far behind, if these two writers do, the position of women to that of the Blacks in the ghettos and the Jews under Hitler. Bawlingly, Women, Negroes and the Holocaust are treated in these books as a sort of trinity of victimization. And the volumes are brought out in this country, as if they were appropriate to Britain, by the Women's Press of Shoreditch High Street, an institution in which, however, I would have little confidence if I were a woman, because of the surprising ineptness of the symbol at its masthead. This is a crude drawing of an electric chair, iron hissing over a very crumpled garment on an ironing-board, with the motto: "Steaming Ahead". Little promise of liberation here, I should have thought, since the steam in a steam-iron is a dampen-against not a driving-force, and in any case the iron is anchored to the wall-plug. The choice of this tattered domestic utensil must represent a subconscious relapse into automatic feminine acceptance of household chores, an attitude long out of date in many English homes.

Although the two volumes read, for the most part, like a double version of the same book, there is a difference of emphasis between them. Andrea Dworckin is the more aggressive of the two writers, and she has a rather simpler view of the Male, whom she sees as pure sexual drive, coupled with an evil thirst for violence and domination. Here are some astonishing, but representative, quotations:

Adult men tend not to rape their own sons or close male relations, so as not to risk rape from them. Sexual violence against women and girls is sanctioned and encouraged for a purpose: the active and persistent channelling of male sexual aggression against females protects men and boys rather effectively from male sexual abuse.

In the intimate world of men and women, there is no mid-twentieth century distinct from any other century. There are only the old values, women there for the taking, the means of taking determined by the male...

In the main, the abominable She is held responsible for everything bad, fearful or alienating that ever happened to the fully-human-Me...

In adoring violence - from the crucifixion of Christ to the cinematic portrayal of General Patton - men seek to adore themselves...

The boys are betting that we cannot face the horrors of their sexual system and survive. The boys are betting that their depiction of us as whores will beat us down and stop our hearts. The boys are betting that their pees and fists and knives and fucks and rapes will turn us into what they say we are - the compliant women of sex, the masochistic sluts who resist because we really want more. The boys are betting. The boys are wrong.

Well, I hope we boys have a clearer idea than that of what we are up to; we cannot both stop the hearts of our whipping-girls and continue to get fun out of them.

Susan Griffin is just as gratuitously dogmatic in her generalizations as Ms Dworckin. For instance, she makes the astounding remark that today which does not express a profound hatred of the bodies of women, and a fear of human nature and human life. But she is more subtle in suggesting that men hate women firstly because of the female element within themselves, which culture has taught them to repress, and secondly because the female body reminds them of their links with the animal world, a connection which both fascinates and repels them: "... a woman's body and so they must be choosing to sell themselves in this way, instead of, or in addition to, earning their living in more modest occupations. The same is no doubt true of the young men in the blue films, or in the gay maga-

The abominable He

By J. G. Weightman

outlet in violence; in their sick minds... the hope of a marriage between spirit and flesh is replaced by a longing for death."

Women have too long been silent in face of this horror. They should speak out in favour of "eros", a term which Ms Griffin seems to take in the broad sense of spiritual love combined with a proper understanding of the physical. But it is not clear to the male reader that he will have any role to play in the erotic Utopia she vaguely adumbrates. Towards the end, her Amazonianism shades off tantalizingly into the ineffable inane.

Culture is part of nature; we who are born of nature, who are nature, want to know nature. We are singers. And the world is a resonant place. Yes, the singer is afraid of the song, as we are afraid of Eros, for within Eros is annihilation. But the song will not be silent.

Although I can agree, here and there, with certain statements contained in these books, I confess to being unable to make any overall sense of them. My main complaint is that they persistently confuse two themes which, while obviously interrelated, are better considered apart: pornography and real-life sexual relations.

The widespread commercial development of pornography, in books, photographic magazines, films and now video-cassettes, is a very recent phenomenon, and a consequence of sexual liberation working on the open market and taking advantage of modern equipment. In former periods, pornography was, for the most part, clandestine and confined to the socially privileged. In Victorian times, there were, presumably, a great many prostitutes on the London streets, but no angry magazine publicly on sale as now. It is arguably better to have nude images available on the bookshelves, whatever use the purchasers make of them, rather than impoverished, diseased females touting on the pavements.

But this only moves the problem one stage back. Are the women photographed for the porn trade, or on display in the nude shows and blue films, not being as cruelly victimized as their Victorian predecessors? Dworckin and Griffin assume that they are, but I doubt it. The great majority of them look extremely attractive and healthy - very different, for instance, from the wretched creatures in the terrible pornography emanating from the Third World and so they must be choosing to sell themselves in this way, instead of, or in addition to, earning their living in more modest occupations. The same is no doubt true of the young men in the blue films, or in the gay maga-

zines and the centre-spreads of certain women's papers.

It is a question of individual freedom. Ms Griffin gives a would-be pathetic summary of Linda Lovelace's suffering at the hands of her pornographer-husband, but she neglects to explain why Linda, a middle-class girl with decent parents in the background, stayed with him so long when he was so awful. It is not enough to say that women have been brain-washed by the prevailing male ethos, because that ethos began breaking down a century ago, and history shows that it was never absolute. Now, in the circumstances of modern Western Europe at least, and on the Lysistrata principle, women could put an end to pornography pictures at once by refusing to be photographed. The most depressing feature of the Dworckin and Griffin books is that their emotional force is not addressed positively to the inherent dignity of women, which might achieve that end; it is largely misdirected into a sterile, inter-female yamming against men.

It is also curious that Dworckin and Griffin should make no attempt to distinguish between the different kinds of pornography, and should ignore the fantasy function of all varieties. They take it for granted that all pornography is an insult to women, involves cruelty to women and is literally true. They quote a motley bunch of examples: books, magazines and actual case-histories of sexual crimes but one cannot help noticing that they constantly return to certain purely verbal works, which might be termed "black classics": the writings of the Marquis de Sade, an eighteenth-century aristocratic libertine, and two twentieth-century novellas, *L'Histoire d'O* by the pseudonymous "Pauline Réage" and *L'Histoire de Peol* by Georges Bataille. As a French specialist, I have had to read these books more than once in the line of duty, and I would put them firmly in the category of the pathological, by which I mean that they represent extreme hypertrophy of the sado-masochistic tensions which seem to be inseparable from all sex, but in most cases remain within reasonable bounds. Sade, a sado-masochistic bi-sexual, juggles with sex, torture, murder and necrophilia; Réage offers a mystic expression of female immolation, and Bataille a variety of weird adventures linking sex and death. All three are no doubt highly significant from the medico-psychological point of view, but to imply that they are typical of the sexual attitudes and daily practice of *l'homme moyen sensuel* is about as plausible as asserting that all mothers of small children are baby-batters.

It is true that some critics have praised these writers excitedly, and Ms Griffin has a point when she singles out a particularly silly quotation about Sade in a book by the late Roland Barthes. But we are at liberty to disagree with the critics, and to consider the Sade cult, for instance, as a literary aberration requiring separate analysis - an aberration furthered, incidentally, by certain "liberated" women such as Susan Sontag and Angela Carter. Also, both Dworckin and Griffin overlook the significance of the fact that Sade was put in gaol on a *lettre de cachet* solicited by his mother-in-law, and that he spent most of his life in confinement, which means that he was disowned by his male contemporaries.

At the dark end of the pornography market, there is a quantity of material repugnant to "normal" sensibilities. The psychiatrists disagree about whether it promotes acts of cruelty, or is an imaginative substitute for them, or can have either function in differing circumstances. Ms Dworckin defines all pornography as "Daehua in the bedroom", which is surely excessive. On the evidence given to the Williams Committee, it would indeed be the imaginative substitute for theory, and I suspect that Ms Griffin too exaggerates in asserting that Sade tortured "countless women". The police records, as I remember, indicate that he was a bungling, haphazard sadist. Nor have I ever heard it suggested that Jean Paulhan, the supposed author of *L'Histoire d'O*, or Georges Bataille, with whom I once spent a pleasant, civilized evening, did anything reprehensible in real life. Nevertheless, the books are, in my view, morbid symptoms, just as actual sadistic crimes, committed with or without the stimulus of such pornography, are obviously morbid phenomena.

I am not so sure of the serious morbidity of the glurge magazines of the *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Fiera*, etc. kind. Most of the images, while far below the erotic level of "The Rokeby Venus", correspond to crude male lust, the necessary animal core and universal principle before it attaches itself to the reality of any particular woman. They cannot do much harm to heterosexual relations, unless they induce certain men to prefer photographs and inflexible glamour-dolls to the flesh-and-blood females within their range. They might even help, since they are explicit enough to spare young men the surprises that certain Victorian gentlemen, such as Tennyson, experienced on their wedding-night. They certainly demystify, but that will be deplored only by those who believe in the romantic virtues of mystification. Ms Griffin's contention that they express hatred of the female body is incomprehensible to me. I would have thought that most men, willy-nilly, enjoy this optical prostitution, provided they do not suddenly find their nearest and dearest staring out at them from the glossy pages, and are tickled by the dreams of inexhaustible potency in the accompanying texts. But, in a better society, such trashy products would not exist and, as I have said, women would not lend themselves to such an amoral industry. In the meantime, the difficulty is to decide which repressive measures would not do more harm than good - a practical problem that Dworckin and Griffin completely ignore.

It is not certain that the abolition of pornography would, in itself, make a fundamental difference to the relationship between the sexes, but it has always been wrong, as our authors imply, the commercial proliferation of pornography is only a contemporary symptom of a longstanding malady. When Some Age man dragged his woman round by the hair, he does not seem to have paused to paint or carve obscene graffiti on his cave-wall, but presumably the lady was no better off for that. And in Eastern Europe, where the free market in pornography does not exist and the Marquis de Sade is not a recognized classic, there are

Tales from the Father of History

In Sparta, so they say,
was the ugliest baby girl, parents' despair.
A nurse took her every day
to the sanctuary of Helen. There,

one day, a tall, stunning, gorgeously dressed
lady stood over the horrible little thing, smiled
at the protesting nurse, blessed
the baby and said: "This child

in a land of beautiful women shall grow
to be the loveliest of all." Of course, it was so.

In Egypt, the thickest
of eggs hatched by the Nile
grows into the biggest beast:
the monstrous crocodile.

In Sparta, once again,
they had the best government; perfect, foursquare.
It had been the worst in the memory of men.

Read history with care.

Richmond Latimore

signs of persistent male chauvinism. The centre of the problem, then, is not perennity, which is an epiphenomenon, but in what sense, in the modern world, men should be men and women women. On this issue, Dworkin and Griffin seem to offer second-hand muddle rather than enlightenment.

Dworkin echoes Simone de Beauvoir's dictum from *Le Deuxième Sexe*: "One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman", which means that feminine attitudes are forced upon the female by society. This is a particular application of the general Existentialist principle that there is no given human nature; a female individual who becomes a woman in the pejorative sense is yielding to bad faith by not exercising her freedom to reject the prejudice handed down by society. In Sartre's original version of the doctrine, the physical sexual constitution has no direct effect on psychological gender, because the psyche is absolutely free. However, all human relationships are fundamentally sadomasochistic and sexualized, the "males" being dominant and the "females" recessive. According to their position on the sadomasochistic scale, some men may be female and some women male, and there may be a male/female tension between individuals of the same physical gender. Ms Dworkin, looked at in this light, is rejecting what she considers to be the historically conditioned female stereotype, and is adopting aggressiveness as a sadistic response to male sadism.

Ms Griffin is more Rousseauistic. She puts her trust in Nature, from which humanity has strayed, but to which it would return, happily slinging its natural song, no doubt through an analogy with the birds. Unfortunately, she doesn't explain what the original, natural relationship between men and women was, so Nature, as usual, remains a pure hurray word with no definable meaning. But, since she also refers to man's fear of the feminine element within himself, she must at times be close to the Existentialist view that masculinity and femininity

are not mutually exclusive essences. However, the implication is that a permanent feature of men is to deny the femininity within themselves; consequently, their femininity cannot amount to much.

As they are presented here, neither the neo-Existentialist nor the neo-Rousseauistic line of argument is convincing. If women are conditioned by society to be women, men must also be conditioned to be men, since it is impossible that women should start as neutral potentialities, while men are born as ready-made essences. Ms Griffin admits this at one point, but disregards the implications. Ms Dworkin storms at men, as if they were wicked essences; admittedly, in so doing, she is no more self-contradictory than Sartre himself, who, while denying the reality of essences, constantly treats the hated "bourgeois" as if he were an irredeemable essence.

But, if there are no in-born differences between males and females, where did the social conditioning originate? How did men come to be men, and women women? Everything in society must come from human beings, or from the interplay between unmaking and the external world. In the last resort, neo-Existentialism and neo-Rousseauism coincide, in the sense that they dogmatically postulate the "pure" quality of the individual before he or she is distorted by human relationships. Simone de Beauvoir's dictum is the feminist reformulation of the famous sentence in *Le Contrat social*: "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains". Both assertions, if too simply understood, lead to the paranoid assumption that all social evil comes from the Other to some collective guise; in this instance Men, as if men had come to form a coherent category permanently ranged against women.

Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were childless, like Locke, who invented the idea of the child mind as a *tabula rasa* on which experience writes. Every parent who has observed children and grand-children from birth knows that each individual temperament is unique, is coloured by physical gender, from the

beginning, and then undergoes a further massive conditioning at adolescence. The determinism is in the first place internal, whatever the interplay between the individual and the sexual fashions of the surrounding society. But where the Existentialists and Women's Lib are right is in emphasizing that a great deal of supposedly sexual behaviour has no permanent sexual root, and is no more than surface fashion, or perhaps fashion which has survived an original usefulness. I have noticed that some little boys will play with dolls' houses. If they are not teased for doing so, and that some little girls may prefer cars or trains. These are tiny examples but, combined with various developments in the contemporary world and anthropological evidence about the distribution of sexual roles in different societies, they show that, on one level, masculinity and femininity are very elastic concepts. On another level, however, they remain irreducible.

As for male chauvinism, whether or not it has anything to do with pornography, it may have been inevitable in the Stone Age and in some later periods as a necessary consequence of a division of labour between provider-defenders and child-bearers, but it has obviously no justification as a simple expression of male selfishness in advanced technological societies, where what counts in the general running of the community is the ability and character of the individual, independently of physical gender.

This is meant as a declaration of sweet reasonableness in response to the confused passion of Dworkin and Griffin. But I realize that it doesn't take us far. Women, until further notice, will continue to bear children, with all the ensuing consequences. The physiological constitutions of men and women are usually at variance on many days in the month. Sex, as sex, being a fundamentally animal part of our nature, remains largely barbaric in any civilization. But at least men and women can try to treat each other as partners in coping with its essential, and often poetic, barbarism.



The fusion of the erotic and the aesthetic has long been recognized as a deeply rooted aspect of the Eastern consciousness. Indian art, in particular, reflected a religious outlook that viewed sexual love as a metaphor for the divine, a process by which the world is constantly re-created, and which offered to its human participants an inner experience of the eternal. In Indian temple sculpture one of the most ancient images, and still the most common, of the divine creative principle is the lingam, the erect male phallus. Such art was without the prudish overtones which might have disconcerted Western observers; sexual pleasure was an end to be unreservedly pursued. The palace courtesans who offered sophisticated delights on earth were matched by celestial females called Apsaras, ready to reward dead heroes with heavenly pleasures. One such, in the act of unfurling her skirt, is shown in this stone-carving from the Rajaraj temple, Bhuvanesvara, Orissa. It dates from about AD 1000, and forms one of the illustrations to Eastern Erotic Art (176pp. Quartet Books, £15.00 7043 2291 9). Philip Rawson's lavishly illustrated monograph, which devotes equal attention to the erotic art of India, China and Japan.

Doing without gender

By Roger Scruton

MARY VETTERLING-BRAGGIN
(Editor)
Sexual Language
A Modern Philosophical Analysis
329pp. Littlefield, Adams and Co
(distributed by Sheldon Press).
£4.75.
0 8226 0353 5

"A person could be powerful without exercising the control oneself." That sentence comes from the pen of a distinguished political economist. After a moment's hesitation I took it to mean: "Someone could be powerful without exercising the control himself." The barrier to intelligibility stems from a conviction that grammatical distinctions of gender should be eliminated, unless they are relevant to the subject. And this re-education of the common language is now almost universally accepted by feminists as part of their aim. Should they be encouraged?

The present collection purports to contribute to our understanding of that question. It consists of twenty-three essays which, according to the blurb, represent "pro" and "con" analysis of the feminist claim that much of our language is sexist, in the sense of enforcing, expressing, or lending covert support to, unjustifiable distinctions between men and women. As a matter of fact, there is only one article "con", a rich essay by Michael Levin, chosen for its vulnerability and subjected to extensive nit-picking by the two that follow, and even to a side-swipe from the editor. In her preface, Every other article is written from a standpoint within the feminist movement, and many of them endorse the kind of grammatical aberration from which I began. The essays are exercises in "philosophical analysis", so I

is not surprising to find that they are for the most part cold, humourless, uncultured, and dull. It is somewhat more surprising to find that they contain not a moment's hesitation, not an ounce of scepticism, not the slightest reluctance to advance from jejune premises to the vast and tendentious conclusions about language, about sexuality and sexual relations, about the mystery and meaning of human existence, for which they are each of them remarkable. Every quality that makes the practice of philosophy worthwhile, and its product readable, — the questioning of received ideas, the preparedness to entertain the opposite of one's own conclusions, the sense of the difficulty and complexity of human life and intellect, the search for puzzles and paradoxes rather than ready solutions — is absent from these essays; instead they read like caricature, at first ridiculous, subsequently depressing, of a graduate essay in philosophy, making pointless distinctions, laying out worthless arguments in numbered sentences, defining unnecessary technicalities, and generally assailing the reader's intelligence with swathe of irrelevant words that seem relevant only because so many of the words are obscene. Pedantic listing of vulgar expressions is interspersed with daring theoretical claims — such as that a "feminist linguistics" will overthrow the currently accepted theory of linguistic competence, or that concern about the infrequency of female orgasms embodies a confusion about the concept of sexual intercourse (the concept, note, not the fact).

An assumption common to most of the essays is that, when the sex of a person is not in issue, it would be irrelevant to signal it in language. Suppose I were to say that, whenever I am being a person, rather than a heavy body, was not in issue, it would be irrelevant to refer to me as such. I would surely have lost the

sense of how important, how fundamental to my self-awareness, is this way of identifying myself. To rid my language of the redundant reference to personality would in fact be impossible: I should have to say, not "I am sleeping", but "My body lay sleeping", not "I crushed the cushion", but "My body crushed the cushion", and so on. Now it is a fact that my sex is also fundamental to my self-consciousness: in those things that most matter to me, I think of myself as a man. Should I not do so? The question is a deep one: it requires us to understand the extent to which sexuality enters and determines our nature as human beings, the extent to which we do and must identify ourselves through sexual attributes, the extent to which our lives as moral agents are woven not only on the web of personality, but also with the web of masculine and feminine. The idea that distinctions of sex run so deep that it might actually be inhuman to ignore them is hardly ever entertained in these essays. Of course, it may not be true: but a philosopher ought to be prepared to entertain it, he should not, as our authors do, let such important ideas as "person", "man", and "woman" go unexamined, or rush forward to fore-ordained conclusions with the self-indulgence of a person who seeks only to convince himself.

Very few of the writers seem to be aware of the existence of languages other than English. One of them, however, makes the extremely pertinent (although not quite accurate) observation that Japanese grammar is marked not for sex but for social class. He does not draw any conclusions from this, but perhaps the example is worth considering: does it enable us to identify the role of class in the Japanese consciousness, or the extent to which distinctions of class are enforced, expressed, enacted (which of these words is the right

one?) by Japanese speech? Is it significant that one's class can be changed, while one's sex normally cannot? Is my identity as a lower middle-class upstart as fundamental to my way of identifying myself as show that my being male is, after all, irrelevant to self-reference? Not only do the writers not examine this extremely important case, where social distinctions are embedded in grammar; they do not extend to other my maleness? If so, should I change my language to accommodate that fact, or should I use that fact to languages in which gender persists. Is it significant, for example, that the feminine version of a proper name in Slavonic languages is formed from the possessive case, so that Mrs Novakova is firmly feminized as Novakova's? (Are the Czechs more possessive of their women than we are?) Is it significant that our central "man" and "he" reflect the German use of *ich* as an impersonal pronoun? Is it significant that persons in French is feminine, or that there are languages, such as Latin, Greek, French and German (all of which seem to be unknown to the contributors) in which distinctions of gender range over inanimate objects? More importantly, what are we supposed to make of languages in which there are no gender distinctions? Take Turkish, for example: There is no way of marking the sex of the subject through Turkish grammar alone: are we to conclude that the Turks have always been in the forefront of the struggle for woman's rights, that Turkish women have all the freedoms and respect that their American sisters presently yearn for, that the institution of the *harem* is the ideal to which all women (and not just Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) should aspire? ("Tis true", wrote Lady Mary, "that their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that would make use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer

it. When a husband happens to be inconstant [as those things will happen] he keeps his mistress in a house apart, and visits her as privately as he can, just as 'tis with you"). Or perhaps Atatürk should have taken the language reforms further, and introduced gender into the language to compensate for the removal of the veil?

It is clear that this question of gender, discussed at the low level of seriousness and cultural attainment exemplified in this book, looks like a fantasy issue, chosen for the readiness with which it lends itself to unthinking prejudice. However, not only is the aim of this tasteless assault on the language a dubious one, it also seems that no amount of learning and culture will suffice to protect us from it. Even the American Modern Language Association, for many years a bastion of serious criticism and literary scholarship, has resolved to remove all "irrelevant" uses of gender from its publications. There is something shrill and hysterical in the fervour that speaks through that resolution; but much more research will be needed before any of us will be in a position to hint at this cause.

Animal Play Behaviour by Robert Fagen (684pp. Oxford University Press, £21, paperback £10.50; 0 19 502 760 4 and 0 19 502761 2) is an investigation into the phenomenon of play as a behavioural tactic available to immature and mature individuals expressed in accordance with strategies dictated by natural selection. The author describes animal play behaviour as a "major biological paradox" and looks at the arguments for the importance of play in social development. *Animal Play Behaviour* stresses the functional and evolutionary biology of play to animal play, using concepts of social evolutionary biology and evolutionary developmental ethology.

BERNARD SPENCER:
Collected Poems
Edited by Reger Bowen
149pp. Oxford University Press. £8.50.
0 19 211930 5

The fluctuation of reputation among poets makes an odd study. Look at the twentieth century alone. A few — a very few — make an almost immediate impact, shoot up like rockets, and stay there, even after their deaths: Auden, Dylan Thomas. Some work more slowly through either humdrumness or misunderstanding to be recognized, sooner or later, as Great: Yeats, Eliot. Others have a brief moment of extraordinary fame, often through early death, and then subside into an area in which they become the closest inspiration for a few later poets, or the subjects of theses written by ambitious academics: Sidney Keyes, Keith Douglas. There are those who have an explicable but somehow bogus period of relative popularity and who then fall to a status lower than the footnote: Humbert Wolfe, Alan Rook.

Then there are those who, perhaps emerging early, seem to drop away, and then are rediscovered — and often ever-praised — by a handful of individuals who see them as neglected touchstones, victims of a supposed later establishment: Basil Bunting, David Casanove, John Heath-Stubb, C. H. Sisson. All these are names currently lauded by one set or another. And then — not finally, because nothing is final in this area of dispute and fashion — there are those dead poets, acknowledged even by their admirers to be minor, who keep on having their claims pressed by a disparate band of enthusiasts: Andrew Young, Norman Cameron, Kenneth Allott, Bernard Spencer.

The case of Bernard Spencer is interesting and instructive. In the 1930s his poems were in *New Verse* along with his very slightly older contemporaries Auden and MacNeice and his exact contemporary, Stephen Spender. He came from the same sort of background of comfort, ably-off professional families (his father was a knighted High Court Judge in Madras) who sent their children to prep schools and public schools: Spencer was at Marlborough at the same time as Bejteman, MacNeice, and Anthony Blunt. From there it was the inevitable passage to Oxford, where he arrived just after Auden's departure. He had a poem in *Oxford Poetry* 1929 (edited by MacNeice and Spender), and was co-editor of the 1930 and 1931 volumes.

After going down from Oxford in 1932 (a Second in Greats), it was an almost classic pre-war case of teaching in prep school, working as an advertising copywriter, and as a script-writer for a small film company. Unfit for military service, in 1940 he took up his first British Council post, in Salonika. From then on, until his mysterious accidental death in Vienna in 1963, Spencer was a Council officer largely working abroad. In Egypt, Sicily, Spain, Greece again, Turkey, and finally Austria. He married twice; his first wife died in Italy in 1947. On his fleeting visits back to Britain over the years he renewed his casual literary friendships in a way movingly recalled in an elegy by the late G. S. Fraser.

The impression that comes across of Spencer the man is of someone rather elegant, quietly stylish and witty, disaffected, with something about him of the faun or sprite, (Geoffrey Grigson was a characteristically apt observation: "Bernard was a spirit, of rather low pressure; you looked at him and he wasn't there; and then a shape came back, and he was palpable again, gentle and sweet in temper.") The difference seems to have extended to his attitude towards publication: he didn't publish his first book (*Agave*, *Hiand*) until 1946, and published only two other books of poems in his lifetime. Ian Fletcher wrung out of him *The Twain in the Plotting*, one of those finely pro-

duced volumes done in the 1950s and 1960s by the University of Reading School of Art, and *With Luck Lasting* came out in the year of his death. As for periodical publication, Spencer seems to have relied almost entirely on Grigson as go-between in *New Verse* in the 1930s and on John Lehmann and Alan Ross in the *London Magazine* in the 1950s and early 1960s. Many poems were published posthumously in the *London Magazine* by Ross, who was also responsible for the earlier *Collected Poems* of 1965.

Roger Bowen has done an excellent job in this new and expanded *Collected Poems*. He repeats all the work from the 1963 volume, and has added twenty-six poems "previously uncollected and unpublished, 1935-1963", as well as an appendix of nine poems written when Spencer was an undergraduate and published in Oxford periodicals and anthologies between 1929 and 1932. Two brief statements made by Spencer in 1942 and 1963 are included, and there are very full bibliographical notes, sometimes with variant readings for individual poems. Bowen's Introduction is full of clearly presented information, and his literary observations and judgments are perceptive and generous without being awfully clever or over-demanding. My only regret is that he has not included an appendix Spencer's conversation with Peter Orr, recorded for the British Council in 1962 and published in *The Poet Speaks* three years after Spencer's death. This conversation amplified and put in context a number of notions hinted at by Spencer elsewhere.

One of these is the necessity of loneliness. Living most of his working life in non-English-speaking communities, professionally having to do the bonhomous British Council thing, he seems almost to have cultivated a kind of gregarious isolation, his literary friendships being sporadic and depending on which bit of the world he happened to be in at any one time. (Keith Douglas, Lawrence Durrell and George Sefers were among these friends.) He lacked a first-hand audience; but

the nature of my life is that I have to keep a lot of company and I don't get enough loneliness. . . . You must let the pressures build up inside you and not be diluted by literary talk.

The intellects and the pressures combined to produce a body of work which is characterized by a sense of detachment and sense of quiddity, of the unrepeatable moment. There is something of MacNeice in this, though Spencer was not MacNeice's mixture of melancholy, formalism and a kind of morose optimism. Some of the early poems included in Professor Bowen's appendix of Oxford work look rather like the youthful, fantastical MacNeice of *Blind Fireworks*. Much later, in the section of uncollected poems, there is "Pino":

A time of waiting. Most of our life is that. . . . But waiting sometimes with the sign of things amazingly connected.

This — Spencer's version of MacNeice's "drunkenness of things being various" — was his way into writing his own best poems: small visions of the things of this world, freshly and quirkily noted.

Fine particular moments

By Anthony Thwaite

part and enjoy yourself"; and enjoyment, of this both joined and separate kind, is the note in so much of his work.

Spencer evidently realized that one inborn or acquired characteristic which held him back was a certain fastidiousness. In that same *Personae/Landscape* piece he writes of the poet having "to brutalize himself" in order to break away from habitual civilities; and in this he was echoing a brief comment he contributed to the special "Auden Double Number" of *New Verse* in 1937, when he wrote of Auden that he "succeeds in brutalizing his thought and language to the level from which important poetry comes". But he seems to have been thinking, or wishfully thinking, against the grain of his own inclinations. There is nothing brutal or brutalizing in Spencer's poems. Much more, he is Forster's Cavalry, "at a slight angle to the universe". Through the diffidence and the vanishing-act, something distinct emerges.

What that is has to be established through indirectness, as Spencer himself achieved it. He was self-consciously "a stranger here" — for example in "Notes by a Foreigner": "Illusion, of note failure — to see except as a foreigner. . . . and in Letter Home": "City where I live, I have home, and that flowers with white, what in all worlds am I doing here?" These are ways of fixing and defining oneself. But equally there are those moments which signal "things amazingly connected". Spencer, early and late, was good in a very unexpected way at memorializing moments of precarious

happiness. In "Part of Plenty" (1937), he begins with a celebration of his first wife, Nora:

When she carries food to the table and slopes down —
Doing this out of love — and lays soup with us good
Ticking smell, or fry winking from the fire
And I look up, perhaps from a book I am reading,
Or other work: there is an importance of beauty
Which can't be accounted for by there and then
And attacks me, but not separately from the welcome
Of the food, or the grace of her arms. . . .

And in what was one of his last poems, written in 1963, "Traffic in April", he catches a moment of wonderful accident and hilarity in Vienna, on a day when he was being driven on Embassy business through traffic chaos:

The Austrian driver lifted his hands from the wheel and sat guffawing.
The snow just melted, the church towers, the golden hands of the clocks glittering.
We had little German or English for communication, but the two of us, clambering out to gap.

On that fine particular day, I had the kind of language needed for a screw-loose world, and for laughing.

Spencer's poems are full of such fine particular days, or moments in such days. His slightly bemused professional exile to various parts of the Mediterranean, especially, gave him a sense of daily contact with a living

past. In the interview with Peter Orr, he said: "The fact of being in some sort of continuity with earlier civilizations does have an exciting effect on me". He collaborated with Nanos Valaeris and Lawrence Durrell on those fine versions of Sefers which John Lehmann published as *The King of Asine*; and though Spencer lacked (and presumably never sought) the elusive rhetoric of Sefers, something of the pastness — and estranged — archaeology was there; in, for example, Spencer's "Greek Excavations", "Acce", and "Sarcophagi".

Homelier, less exotic moments are captured just as felicitously, in a number of poems remembering his dead wife, or in such a poem as "The Wedding Pictures", in which the sharpness of detail accumulates towards the unexpected stab of the last two lines:

New from his morning at the graveyard and on his shoes the crust of graveyard clay.

His were very personal rhythms, sometimes uncertain, or at any rate difficult to follow. The detail — and it is a poetry carried by detail — occasionally seems to wander away from any forward thrust, as if such confidence would be a betrayal, or a coarsening of his instinctive quizzical sear. But there is never anything less about him. Through all the directions there remains, after one has followed him through the poems in this splendid edition, the flavour of a distinct and irreplaceable person. Bernard Spencer may have been "minor"; but his admirers, including Roger Bowen, do well to see that his work is remembered and relished.

Selling circles

By Geoffrey Naylor

DANIEL J. and KATHERINE KYRS
LEAB
The Auction Companion
490pp. Macmillan, £9.95.
0 333 270270 2

The editors of *American Book Prices Current* (the yearly international guide to recent auction results for antiquarian books and MSS which they have revived to new standards of punctuality and excellence) have had the good idea of compiling a handbook of the world, in its first edition, which is inevitably a bit patchy (Denmark and Sweden, but no Norway), and although the gazetteer ends impressively with Zimbabwe (Fitz-Gerald & Des Fontaines of Que Que), the bias is naturally towards a London-New York axis. On this line there is of course an emphasis on the Christie's/Sotheby's market, where commercial history and current practice dictate standards for the rest of the world. But the two most famous firms no longer hog even the uppermost part of the scene. Mr and Mrs Leab are able to add to the old joke that Christie's were gentlemen pretending to be businessmen, and Sotheby's vice versa, the quip that "it can now be said that Sotheby's and Christie's are multinational public companies, pretending to be private firms, while Phillips is a private firm pretending to be a public company".

The *Auction Companion* has a good deal of useful advice for the novice on how to buy and how to sell, when to bid in person, or through an agent, or through the desk. They are particularly insistent that intending sellers should inform themselves in advance of the various charges that will be deducted from their realized prices, and advise them to avoid "auction consultants", whose advice is usually based on which auction house will give the highest bidder's fee for bringing in the goods. They are rather draconian about dealers' rings, disapproved only in very general terms if it would have been useful, though impractic-

able, to have had detailed local intelligence, saleroom by saleroom ("Ask Albert Tallock, usually in the snug bar of the Rover's Return", etc).

It is not just the tyro buyer who will find the *Companion* helpful. It will be particularly useful even for experienced international purchasers for the up-to-date information it gives on local and national tax complications, and on export restrictions. Thus would be purchasers of firearms and ammunition from Weller & Duff, the specialist Birmingham dealer, or those wishing to buy live game at Sotheby's South Africa, Johannesburg, are warned of special regulations. VAT, whether on buyer's surcharges alone, or on the hammer price, is clearly noted; in Denmark a staggering charge of over twenty two per cent on the gross price is a deterrent to the international market.

Local practice as well as local fiscal regulation is dealt with in an introductory note to each country. There is a particularly clear exposition of the dominant role of the exclusive seventy-eight brethren of the *Compagnie des Commissaires-Priseurs de Paris*, still being cautiously challenged, and the complexities of the as yet only partially awakened Japanese market are mentioned for the benefit of the unwary occidental punter.

Over six hundred auction houses are listed, the editors having processed very humbly their answers to a detailed questionnaire. Some may be less grand and organized than they seem from their short entries; there are a number of Irish firms (Ulster and Blue) that sound as if they came straight out of *An Irish Riddle*. Social facilities are mentioned as well as buying and selling terms, range of services, and cataloguing practice. At O'Gallerie of Portland, Oregon, the (1972) founder Mr Dele O'Grady conducts a family business in which his grandson runs the snack-bar on sale nights. Unusual specialties are picked out; there is a firm in San Diego with a life in architectural antiques for commercial restaurant interiors; another in Houston, specializing in quality reproductions in wax, ranging out of

London; we read of one dealing mainly with earth-moving equipment in Sydney, and there are Prussian decorations to be bought in Munich from auctioneers who are published authorities on Nazi militaria.

Six hundred is not 'enough'. There were bound to be omissions on the first appearance of a novel compilation. The north of England, particularly the north-east, seems at present to be under-represented, and Portugal, Malta, Gibraltar and Egypt are surely not innocent of salerooms. The next edition would be improved by a topographical index so that auction firms in Stamford or Ormskirk, Buffalo or Chattanooga could be picked out by place as well as by speciality or alphabetical order of company name.

Apart from technical information about trade descriptions and premiums (commendably up-to-date, although the book went to press before the arbitrators' report on the London dispute over Christie's and Sotheby's buyers' charges was available), there is much diverting general information. Dutch auctions, "we are told, are apparently unknown in the Netherlands, and the provincial 'coolers' of the United States have a courtesy title given to all auctioneers, not merely to those from Kentucky. Mr and Mrs Leab also mention that a bored catalogue of modern paintings at Christie's some years ago invented an artist called Van Hassell, and managed to sell the work. The authors convey their carefully prepared information with an engaging patter, and without being too jokey about it show that buying at auction, or merely frequenting the room as an informed browser, can be fun.

The latest edition of *The British Art & Antiquary Yearbook* (611pp. National Magazine Co., £8.50, 0 90030 524 X) lists, as usual, London dealers alphabetically and provincial dealers under their appropriate town and county headings, but this year there is a useful new Specialists Section. This contains the names, addresses and telephone numbers of dealers offering antiques and works of art, classified under 174 categories, ranging from American to Wrought-iron.

A touch of the Peasant Quality

By Frank Tuohy

LIAM O'FLAHERTY:

The Black Soul
256pp. £6.
0 905473 63 9
Shame the Devil
285pp. £8.
0 905473 64 7
Dublin: Wolfhound Press.

Liam O'Flaherty was a famous name among Irish writers during the first years of Independence, but after publishing some thirty or more books he stopped writing in the early 1950s. Two of these books have now been reissued. *The Black Soul*, described by AE as "the most elemental thing in Irish literature", was his second novel, which came out in 1924. *Shame the Devil*, written ten years later, is a chapter of autobiography, a fluently written account of his struggle with "writer's block" — though one might say that in the case of a writer who had published approximately twenty books in the previous decade, writer's block was an example of outraged nature reasserting her rights.

O'Flaherty arrived with impeccable credentials for the second generation of the Irish literary movement: if he had not existed, it was said, it would have been necessary to invent him. Reading about him makes him seem like a character in somebody's else's fiction, and raises the question as to whether he himself was the best witness to his own extremely varied experience. He was born in the Aran Islands in 1896, about the same time that W. B. Yeats and Arthur Symonds paid their visit and encouraged J. M. Synge to follow them there. Unlike these writers, O'Flaherty was the child of extremely poor peasants; Gaelic was his first language. His escape from the islands was by the traditional

means: he planned to enter the priesthood and in this way gained an education which took him as far as University College, Dublin.

Later, he attributed this step to calculation, but his subsequent life would indicate that the experience misread him indelibly. Following a path which was to see much two-way traffic in future years, he moved from the rigidities of an authoritarian church to those of the Communist Party. But he contracted another allegiance in between these two: soon after the outbreak of the First World War, he enlisted in the Irish Guards as a private soldier, and spent three years on the Western Front. The effects of this experience — what was then known as "shell-shock" — were to mark him more profoundly than anything else. Trauma and regeneration provide the theme of both *The Black Soul* and *Shame the Devil*. It has been suggested, moreover, that the working out of his wartime experience was a prime motive in his writing, and that, after achieving some sort of resolution, he gave up writing altogether.

In 1922 O'Flaherty led a small group to occupy the Rotunda in Dublin and declare an Irish Soviet. After this farcical interlude, his political faith seems to have become secondary to his literary career. His first novel was accepted by Jonathan Cape and their reader, Edward Garnett, became a sort of father-figure to him, as he had been to many other writers, though his enthusiasm was likely to wane if they became commercially successful. According to O'Flaherty, "We practically wrote *The Black Soul* together. I remember his turning 30,000 words of manuscript upon which I had spent a whole month. I could have shot him." London rather than Dublin at this time was the place where O'Flaherty's ambition lay: H. E. Bates, another Garnett protégé, describes his "fierce blue unstable

eyes" as he recited "flowing nonsense... about 'women pressin' their thighs into the warm flanks of the horses.'" Sean O'Casey's wife found him handsome, immaculate, surrounded by admirers, and conciliated. He himself thought that "the English hate all Irish people who are not clowns for their amusement". He was up against the problem of presenting his experience unaltered but in a way that would be accessible to English and American readers, from whom alone success would come. In this he was less proficient than others of his generation.

The Black Soul was a failure in London but received the accolade of AE and other Irish critics. It is the story of Fergus O'Connor, called throughout "The Stranger", who comes to the islands to recover from a breakdown. He lodges with a beautiful peasant woman, Little Mary, and her impotent, partially insane husband Red John. The narrative takes us through the four seasons and ends with Red John's final madness and death, and the departure of "The Stranger", now cured, and Little Mary for the mainland. *The Black Soul* is full of what the Abbey Theatre used to call P.Q. — Peasant Quality — though the characterization is rudimentary, even for a novel that aims at poetry and romance. The somewhat colourless dialogue can be attributed to the fact that O'Flaherty was transcribing Gaelic: he had no need to invent anything like Synge-alese or Lady Gregory's Kiltartan, since no-one finds his own language picturesque. But his descriptive prose is often brilliant. He has a strong visual sense — his novel *The Informer* became a famous film — and here the madose and death of Red John are presented with that sort of high melodrama which would be effective on the screen.

In the 1920s and 1930s, such a book would have been a candidate for the Nobel Prize, but a fatally

frivolous English reader cannot forget *Cold Comfort Farm*. Apart from a lack of humour — it is difficult to forget the scenes where mad Red John drives his two black pigs up and down the mountain — there are objections at a deeper level. It is pardonable for J. M. Synge, a complete outsider, to be wrong about the Aran Islands, to romanticize what was in fact a rural slum, where children were living on boiled oatmeal. With O'Flaherty, who must have known the truth but wished to hide it, there seems to have been a lapse in sincerity in order to please his public.

Again, both in *The Black Soul* and in the short story "The Carass", which concludes *Shame the Devil* and represents the breakthrough from his writer's block, there is an unlikely presentation of sexual relationships in an intensely puritanical society. As H. E. Bates's observation suggests, O'Flaherty often sounds like

D. H. Lawrence with a brogue.

The centre of interest in autobiography is supposed to be the self, rather than the outside world. But in Irish literary memoirs the pleasure usually depends on watching the paying off of old scores. Yeats, George Moore, Sean O'Casey are all masters of the genre. *Shame the Devil* lacks this element. Absence of humour is again a problem. Though he writes in the George Moore manner, with a lot of insinuating dialogue, some of which is carried on with himself, the final effect is somewhat tiresome and egotistic: there is the feeling that both the man and his experience are being undersold.

Both these books arouse an interest in O'Flaherty and his work which they fail to satisfy. But it is hard to decide whether that interest is a genuinely literary one, or curiosity about an unusual figure in the cultural history of modern Ireland.

The decay of purpose

By Holly Eley

ROY A. K. HEATH:

Geothia
185pp. Allison and Busby. £5.95.
0 8503 410 0

As a portrait of a fragmented, post-colonial society with no real history, in which nihilistic characters find little outlet for their feelings beyond illusion or each other, Roy A. K. Heath's trilogy of novels — *From the Heat of the Day*, *One Generation* and *Genetha* — recalls Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; a significant difference being that Heath is himself Guyanese, and not an observer from the outside.

In *From the Heat of the Day*, Sonny Armstrong's dependence on women is the main theme. His wife's social background is different from his own, and the divergence of their expectations, coupled with obsessive reliance on each other inevitably form an enclosed, diseased atmosphere in which their two children and their two unpaid maids are trapped. All of Heath's male characters are flawed, however apparently self-sufficient and attractive. Armstrong's son Rohan, who as a child has benefited from the kindness of Esther (the steadiest of the two maids) as well as from a good education, is shown in *One Generation* to be as vulnerable as his father. His unreasonably persistent attachment to a married East Indian woman is the cause of unhappiness to many, and in other surroundings it would provoke tragedy of Dostoevskian proportions. In all three novels dramatic behaviour is designed by the torpor of the society to which it takes place. However attractive the elegant, decaying Georgetown residential streets, or the primitive settlement of Moravhanna in New Amsterdam where, in *Genetha*, Rohan's sister Genetha lives "a season of ineffable contentment" with her snooker-ace lover, fingers, we are always aware that this is Conrad's land without memories.

On one level *Genetha* is a perceptible account of a young black woman's independent life after the death of her father, followed by the self-exile and death of an older brother; on another level it is an intense search for self. What happens to her is overlaid but doesn't seem particularly so. Picturesque Barbados, fret-worked balconies, ubiquitous cake-shops, the jungle with its blue and emerald tropical birds — all are beautifully described but this lush backdrop hardly ameliorates the bleakness of Genetha's condition.

The novel has some good jokes (though the one about the drunken wake and the exhumed corpse is surely due to retirement) and some effective, passing descriptions of landscape and weather and the effect on the minds and characters of the country people. Mullen is a talented and ambitious writer, but *Genetha* is too sophisticated for the profundity of myth and too arbitrary to be wholly satisfying as a novel.

deed throw away, everything she has in order to be free. Without difficulty or regret she risks herself of her respectable, church-going sulor, then of her respectable reputation. Her happiness with macho, idle fingers is brief, and ends when she makes over her family home to him and finds herself evicted. Her short stay in an asylum is not dwell on, although later it becomes clear that during it something occurred which gave her the courage to forgo further cyclical involvements with men. Moving from one cheap lodging to another, from a demeaning job as a waitress to one as an assistant in a corner grocery, enfeebled by self-neglect and lack of food she is rescued by her parents' ex-maid, who provides her with shelter and tolerates her introspection and directionlessness. Esther has become a madam and Geothia, passively, becomes an amateur prostitute. Heath's ear for language is exact; some of the best moments occur in dialogues between Esther's good-natured, bucolic whores — the only wholly cheerful characters in the book — and the drifting West Indians, whose machismo requires them to rely heavily on institutionalized sex.

Genetha too is a drifter, moving with seeming vacuity from menial job to brothel, from brothel to her aunt's villa and back to the rooming house, unable to translate her liberty into a sense of purpose, but before the aimlessness there is resolve, and she continues to search for meaning to a society that, having no idea of itself, is unable to provide her with one. As her detachment grows, she looks, at first hesitantly, then with conviction, to the Catholic church for spiritual help. In what might seem a cynical ending — it is only too predictable in the ambience depicted by Heath — the church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less.

Like her mother she is determined to be herself and escape the dominance of weak men, unlike her mother she is prepared to lose, to

From the refinery

By T. A. Shippey

JEAN QUEVAL (Translator):

Beowulf
L'épopée fondamentale de la littérature anglaise
185pp. Paris: Gallimard.

Medievalists frequently find themselves engaged in the exercise of comparing English works with their French originals, sources, or inspirations: Malory with the "Vulgate Cycle", *The Owl and the Nightingale* with the "Laistig" lay, *Sir Gawain* (perhaps) with Chrétien's *Yvain*. The results are consistent enough to reinforce simple cultural stereotypes. As works are translated from French to English, they become emotionally flatter, more interested in the outside world, more inclined to ethical compromise. Often, too, one gets a sense of the early English writer, while fascinated and dominated by his foreign model, mentally pursuing his lips and muttering the medieval equivalent of "This will never do".

It is accordingly something of a shock (no doubt salutary) to be faced with the reverse process, *Beowulf* in French. At first sight the stereotypes still hold good. Jean Queval says plainly in his introduction that "la lettre de Beowulf est impénétrable au français", and gives himself liberty accordingly to translate where necessary the spirit alone. And the spirit of epic, in his view, is fairly inimical, among other things, to feet. When *Beowulf* approaches the Danish klag he finds the evil counsellor Unferth sitting at Hrothgar's feet (see *form*) — a natural posture in an early state of society, even a traditional one. "I will not do in French, though, and has become 'Il était assis dans l'ombre du prince des Danois'. 'In the shade?' (the English poet might have thought). 'What shade? They were inside. It

may be true that Unferth at this moment was overshadowed, controlled by his king, as he would not be later, but I hadn't got on to that yet."

The answer, presumably, is that shades are more dignified *per se* than feet. But *Beowulf*, while immensely on its dignity, has not yet learnt to dignify by abstraction. In this new translation it has had many physicalities pruned. On hearing the brave counsels of Beowulf, Hrothgar, close to despair, leapt up, for all his age: *ahleap tha se gomeia*. In French he "ne se tint plus de joie". By contrast, when Grendel's mother got Beowulf down, she quickly sat on him: *asæat tha*. This becomes "elle assure sa prise et le couvre tout entier", a much less plain and easily visualized action.

The gap between original and translation, English coarseness and French refinement, is at its greatest with Grendel. As is well known, what the hero does to him is to tear his arm off and let him bleed to death. As is less well known, the poet never actually says this in so many words, preferring to keep the shocking resolution cancelled till the moment when the hero is seen laying down hand, arm and shoulder all complete beneath the roof of the hall. However the poet does dwell with relish on the rending and splitting as "sineas aprang, bone-locks burst". None of this is recovered at all by M. Queval, who instead cuts this critical moment very sharply down, covering it with the moralizing remark, "C'est terrible un être qui tombe en quenouille" — a phrase I do not understand, in that context, but one of a string of apostrophes and readers' guides: "Ahi la funeste expédition!... Trompeuse espérance!... Ah, destin trop cruel!"

Beowulf is fiercer than Corneille: one might of course say the same of Dickens, Shakespeare, or Malory, thus arriving at a very simple national characterization. Indeed. More interesting perhaps is the reflection

that while both English and French on the whole agree about who are plainer and who are more refined, each side tends to think the other significantly impolite. This is clear enough from Malory, who noted in his source such matters as King Arthur threatening one of his knights and the knight agreeing, out of fear, but emended silently, perhaps even unconsciously, to a scene in which Sir Gareth supports his uncle the king against Sir Lancelot out of family loyalty and so as to put on a decent show.

By contrast M. Queval seems on occasion uncertain about what is "good form" and what is not, pointing in this way to the surprisingly large areas of English conservatism over the issue of self-respect. He does not respond to understatement. When Beowulf thinks of sailing to Denmark, the wise men "blond him little", is, not at all, i.e. they said it was a good idea. This becomes "voulurent l'en dissuader

... Devait-il se risquer?" But what authority have non-participants over a hero? None at all, evidently. Even in *Sir Gawain*, many centuries later, the bystanders who criticize Arthur for letting Gawain ride off to the Green Chapel do so behind his back, dishonourably. Perhaps "that's his affair" comes more easily in English. In similar style I am sure Queval has got the Danes' prayers to the Devil wrong. Pray to "the slayer of souls" they might. Offspring him "leurs prières de guerre contre la vie tranquille", however, would be too shocking for words. *Wigweorthunga* here means something different, something evil but not leading to an open surrender of class symbols.

A French *Beowulf* is hound, seemingly, to be glossed, to be bowdlerized: "intériorisée et domptée, très française" is Queval's phrase for the danger he feared. Nevertheless Queval would not be translating the poem at all if he did



Good, too, are the emanations of emotional states. *Beowulf* does contain "de brusques décrochages", as Queval notes, and often he clears them up, adding short explanations to the sudden turns of sense of the speeches. However other scenes and speeches in the poem work on an emotional balance of one kind or another, like Beowulf's three-repeated "If I can... if I hear... if he means" in his final words to Hrothgar. It is rare for Queval to miss one of these, while often he brings out unobtrusively an "intentionalization" the poet had forgotten or failed to put into words — like the silent but surely meant comparison between King Hrothgar and the hanged man's father, both of them hand-tied by convention.

Queval's introduction, finally, is worth reading too, if not for its historical speculations (disarmingly written off by the author as "un peu puériles"), then for its surprising outsider's observations on metaphor, redundancy, the "surroité de la consonne" in alliterative verse. This is only the second French translation of *Beowulf* and the first for over a century. Reading it makes one aware how formidable are the barriers to understanding other cultures, even those of near neighbours.

Maggot in your eye

By T. O. Treadwell

MICHAEL MULLEN:

Kelly
192pp. Dublin: Wolfhound Press. £6.
0 905473 69 8

The customary — almost the unique — subject of the Irish novelist is the nature of Irishness, but this theme normally takes one of two mutually exclusive forms, the sardonic or the celebratory. Both approaches have their pitfalls, and the chief danger in the latter, the tendency of celebration to slide into self-congratulation, is particularly pernicious. Michael Mullen's energetic and frequently funny novel is a salute to Irish robustness, but through the familiar boozing, brawling, wenching surface seeps an occasional whiff of smugness.

Kelly is a novel about myth in the form of a myth. As it opens, the eponymous hero lies chained in a field in the County Mayo, writhing in agony as his eye is steadily consumed by a voracious maggot. The reader may suspect at this early stage that he is in the presence of symbolism, and if he turns to the back of the dust jacket where a photograph and short biography of Mullen appear, his suspicion will be reinforced. The author sits, bearing the traditional appearances of the intellectual (oculogonist spectacles, pipe, beard) before a shelf-full of books, while the legend beneath the picture tells of his interest in the literature of the absurd and the psychology of Jung (separate categories, presumably), as well as the art of Zorin and Munch. The effect is to convey the strong impression of a man who has simply "telling the story" as his sole aim, with a maggot in his eye Mullen is making a statement.

Fearing that the maggot will grow until it destroys the countryside, the local people urge drastic action, and the village blacksmith cauterizes Kelly's eye with a red-hot poker. As the fiery thing burns into his socket, Kelly is carried back through fifty centuries to the threshold of the dwarfy, thick doors of his "recept", the hall where the old gods of Ireland are gathered, there to be told that he is one of them.

Kelly's maggot, it seems, is his Irishness — the old Celtic-heretic strain fatally weakened by the coming of St Patrick and Christianity. In modern Ireland, this Irishness is destructive, but the blacksmith's poker burns the maggot into Kelly's very bloodstream and he becomes a god. He returns to a consciousness of the present newly possessed of a Herculean physique, together with readers familiar with the format will have anticipated this massive sexual equipment. Breaking free of his chains, Kelly snatches a sow and a barrel of porter and heads for the hills where he strikes himself naked in the scintillation of his godlike epaulettes and freedom.

Kelly now begins his wandering all over Ireland. He is joined by two companions, Faustus, MacGinty, a dwarf of voluminous reading and extravagant erudition, and Leblide Ludden, a huge and innocent idiot. Both Faustus and Leblide, pure mind and pure body, are ineffectual and frustrated on their own — they need Kelly to bring them together and make them one. The three set out on the back of Lubach Ceol, a horse of woe-begone appearance but magical powers, on a journey which is initially aimless but becomes a quest for Kate Houlihan, pure girl and the most beautiful woman in Ireland, who is being held prisoner by her mad foster-father until she can be married off to the man with the bluest blood in Europe. The latter turns out to be Robert O'Neaga

Bollingbrook, a hideous old rogue, from whose ulcerous embrace Kate is snatched, at the moment of her wedding, by Kelly disguised as a harper.

Myth moves readily into allegory, and it becomes increasingly clear that *Kelly* is a novel about the need for the reinvigoration of Ireland by the old pagan energies. In this sense, Michael Mullen belongs in the company of the Celtic revivalists of the last century, men like Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde who found in Irish legend and folk-tale the seeds of an uncontaminated national consciousness. But the point about these tales is precisely their unlikelihood, their pure and artless lack of sophistication. Mullen, by contrast, is a very self-conscious artist, and as such he is often at odds with the spirit of his material.

Kelly is most successful when it is at its most satirical. The dwarf Faustus is tolerated by his blockish schoolfellows, for example, because of his ability to translate the ruler bits of Ovid for them in the lavatory. And the later myth employment, including Latin tombstone inscriptions — a neat parody of the place of the intellectual to the land of soliloquies and scholars. But the choice of Faustus as a name for this prodigy of learning introduces associations of forbidden knowledge bought at an unspeakable price, associations which, in contrast, is a very self-conscious artist, and as such he is often at odds with the spirit of his material.

The novel has some good jokes (though the one about the drunken wake and the exhumed corpse is surely due to retirement) and some effective, passing descriptions of landscape and weather and the effect on the minds and characters of the country people. Mullen is a talented and ambitious writer, but *Kelly* is too sophisticated for the profundity of myth and too arbitrary to be wholly satisfying as a novel.

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Like her mother she is determined to be herself and escape the dominance of weak men, unlike her mother she is prepared to lose, to

Making with the merry men

By J. A. Burrow

DAVID WILES:

The Early Plays of Robin Hood
97pp. D. S. Brewer. £12.
0 85991 082 2

The early history of the ballads of Robin Hood is obscure. The earliest surviving reference, dating from the 1370s, shows them already well known. In William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Sloth confesses to knowing "rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolph Earl of Chester" better than the stories of Jesus and Mary; and Langland's contemporary, Chaucer, evidently knew them too, for he uses the ballad phrase "merry men" in his burlesque story of Sir Thopas (described as "a good archer"). Shortly after Chaucer's death, an anonymous moralist speaks disapprovingly of men who would commonly rather "hear a tale or a song of Robin Hood: or of some ribaldry than to hear mass or matins". Yet no texts survive from this early period. The oldest is the splendid *Robin Hood and the Monk*, preserved in a Cambridge University Library manuscript of the mid-fifteenth century. Then from Tudor times we have *Robin Hood and the Potter* and the *Gest of Robin Hood*. The next source is the Percy Folio manuscript, dating from the mid-seventeenth century but preserving the archaic *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

These early Robin Hood ballads are full of good things. There is Little John's acceptual observation, in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, about "swearers" or drunks:

"Swearers are swift, master," quoth John.
"As the wind that blows over a hill;
For if it be never so loud this night,
Tomorrow it may be still."

Or in the *Gest of Robin Hood*, the laconic dismissal of the unhappy Sheriff of Nottingham, who has just

spent a hard night in the greenwood ("hepe" is a bip or haw).

Now hath the sheriff sworn his oath,
And home he began to go;
He was as full of green wood
As ever was hepe of stone.

These products of the yeoman minstrelsy of late medieval and Tudor England can be read, with pleasure and ease, in Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* or in the excellent recent collection by R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rhymes of Robin Hood* (1976). It is, however, hardly possible to arrive at any secure conclusions about their origin and development. The extant poems must be no more than a surviving fraction of many wicker rhymes, which kept men from the Bible and the Mass. One can only be grateful that they were not all lost, as were the rhymes of Randolph Earl of Chester to which Langland also refers.

The case is even worse with the early plays of Robin Hood, to which David Wiles devotes his slender book. The earliest reference listed by Wiles dates from 1427, when twenty poems were given to players for performing the play of Robin Hood before the mayor at Exeter. The next English allusion occurs in a letter written by Sir John Paston to his brother in 1473, speaking of a servant he has retained "this three year to play St George, and Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham". From about the same time, and possibly from the same Paston household, there survives the one really old text of a Robin Hood play, known as *Robin Hood and the Sheriff*. During the following decades references to the plays become more frequent, especially in churchwardens' accounts; but no further texts survive until the early years of Queen Elizabeth, when two plays were printed, *Robin Hood and the Friar* and *Robin Hood and the Potter*, both "very proper to be played to May games".

Mr Wiles has taken on the difficult task of studying the extremely frag-

mentary remains of this dramatic tradition, which evidently rose parallel to the ballad tradition at least from the fifteenth century. From the surviving references, he attempts to reconstruct the folk Robin of the May games. He concludes that this Robin was a mock king or lord of misrule, closely associated with the Summer Lord or Lord of the May and representing the life-giving green of spring. Referring to Ladurie's *Carnival*, Wiles stresses the subversive tendencies of these folk games; but the descriptions he cites of Robin Hood going from village to village with a band of merry men selling greenwood badges for the benefit of church funds suggest that the "marlure" may on occasion have been more subversive than a Poppy Day. The trouble is, of course, that only those events which received some official recognition, approving or otherwise (one Edinburgh worthy refers to the "wild wicket manner of Robene Hude"), can be known to us today. Perhaps the unintentional occasions would have given more support to Wiles's anthropological speculations about fertility rituals. They might even have justified (for no surviving evidence does) his suggestion that the plays can be taken as an "institutional" expression of egalitarian sentiment. Though the Robin Hood of the ballads hates avaricious churchmen and corrupt local officials, he gladly bows the knee to their masters, God and Edward our king; and the Robin of the May games adopts the conventional hierarchical organization of bastard feudalism when he issues liveries to his retinue. Wiles is more convincing when he suggests that "the Robin Hood game at Whitman gave unmarried girls the chance to assert their group identity".

The only really substantial evidence for the actual content of an early Robin Hood play is provided by the twenty-one short couplets of the fifteenth-century "Paston" fragment; and Wiles's treatment of this crucial text leaves much to be desired. Since the manuscript records nothing but bare dialogue, without speakers' names or stage directions, the action of this play is hard to reconstruct. Child long ago identified the story as that of the Percy Folio ballad *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, where Robin meets and beheads a mysterious adversary dressed in a horse's skin, "top and all and mane"; and this identification more or less makes sense of the older fragment. Wiles sees in it two separate playslets, the second of which, he thinks, has nothing to do with the ballad; but his reconstruction does not improve on that of Dobson and Taylor, who follow Child. None of the editors, in fact, are as careful as they should be in studying this one precious nugget of hard evidence: they overlook the caber-tossing competition between Robin and Guy, for example.

In his general discussion of the text, Wiles allows his theories about ritual folk drama to dictate his conclusions. Although he accepts Child's identification of the fragment with Sir John Paston's play of "Robin Hood and the Sheriff", he persists in treating it as if it represented "plays designed for performance to village may-games", and invents a story of how Wood, Sir John's servant, picked the play up on his travels (no folk drama being recorded in East Angles) and "circulated it among the servants of one of the Paston households". This gratuitous speculation indicates the author's determination to defend the "folk" character of the plays. One almost expects him to interpret poor Wood as an incarnation of the forest, or a green man. He does go so far as to suggest that his dramatic activities "took place without his master's blessing" — in flat defiance of the one thing that Sir John Paston's letter plainly says: "I have kept him this three year to play St George, and Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham". Although there can be no doubt that Robin Hood plays were performed at village May games, the Paston evidence

tells against any exclusively "folk" interpretation.

Wiles stresses throughout the importance of the dramatic tradition, and he rightly objects to the assumption that the plays always borrow from the ballads. It is indeed probable that Maid Marian, who does not appear in the early ballads, entered the company of Robin Hood first in the May games. Other suggestions of dramatic influence on the ballads are less convincing. Remembering the queasy in ballads of a contest between Robin and some stranger, a friar, shepherd or tanner who afterwards joins the "merry men", Wiles observes: "The combat motif in the ballad tradition has only one explanation, that it was inspired by the may-games in which combat played such an important part." But this is to ignore, as the author commonly does, the relation of the ballads to the Middle English romances, where the combat motif is of course customary.

This is a disappointing book on an excellent subject. The complete absence, in my copy, of the map forming Appendix 4 is hard to forgive in a book of ninety-seven pages costing twelve pounds. In so slight a volume, room could surely have been found to quote more of the early references, instead of simply listing their printed sources in an appendix. The author presents a full text of the three early plays, but these were already available to Dobson and Taylor's book. Discussion of the Robin Hood plays will always remain a speculative business, but one may hope for a more substantial study than this.

In *Tolkien and the Silmarils* (104pp. Thames and Hudson, £5.50, 0 500 01264 4) Randal Helms describes the sources of *The Silmarils*, both classical and Biblical, and its major themes. He also explains its complex relationship with Tolkien's other major works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and shows how it underlies them both.

Death of the hero

By Oswyn Murray

MARY RENAULT:
Funeral Games

256pp. John Murray. £6.95.
0 7195 38883f

With *Funeral Games* Mary Renault completes her trilogy on Alexander the Great. In *Fire from Heaven* she took a favourite subject of antiquity, the education of the hero: two contemporaries of Alexander, Onesitrus and Mithras of Pella, had already tried it, with the advantage of having actually been present; but they are little more than names. Mary Renault's account was magnificently convincing, offering an unforgettable portrait of Alexander's wild mother, Olympias, and witty sketches of such minor characters as Ariston and Domestichos. *The Persian Boy* followed Alexander on his conquests across the world. It was remarkable for being cast in the form of the memoirs of a Persian eunuch, favourite of Darius and Alexander: this unity of viewpoint enabled Mary Renault to give an entirely favourable account of Alexander, ignoring the tensions aroused by his adoption of Persian habits among the Macedonians who comprised his court and his army; ultimately the picture was too sentimental, but it was a virtuoso performance. In *Funeral Games* we are given an account of the decade following Alexander's death, written in chronicle

form, as a series of vignettes of the struggles he left behind.

"If he were dead the whole world would stink of his corpse", said the Athenian politician Demosthenes; and this is clearly the view of Mary Renault. She regards the age as one of murder, treachery and greed, without meaning or interest; her aim is merely to dramatize the violence and the deaths, and to show the inevitable disintegration, the return to Macedonian customs, when her hero has departed. The result is frankly a novel without a centre, whose interest lies only in its colours: Mary Renault has always been poor at laying them on thickly. The book, though a good light read, does not stand up to the earlier works in power of conception. This reveals of course an important aspect of Mary Renault's art: she is a hero-worshipper; for all her accuracy of research and vividness of narrative she cannot create a world without a hero.

In a sense therefore her vision is historically accurate, if artistically unsatisfactory. The period was one in which the void created by Alexander's death was the most important single factor: the novel would have pointed up this dimension if Mary Renault had concentrated more on the missing king, and added perhaps with 306 ac, when after seventeen years the first of the successor dynasts dared usurp that title which belonged to Alexander. But this is only part of the story; for the vacuum allowed the creation of a world culture, far more important

than any which Alexander had conceived with his facile rituals of unity - a fusion of Greece and the Orient which ultimately produced Christianity. And even to contemporaries it was a world of deep if uncomfortable meanings. Mary Renault mentions in passing Hieronymus of Cardia, the greatest of the lost historians of antiquity, whose pale ghost peers through the mundane prose of Diodorus - a writer with the power and range of Thucydides. In extreme old age, from the vantage point of the more settled and more boring world of the Successor Kingdoms, he sums up the lessons of the period:

Who, taking thought for the uncertainties of human life, would not be astonished at the alternating ebb and flow of fortune? Or who, putting his trust in the power he enjoys when Fortune favours him, would adopt a bearing too high for mortal weakness? For human life, as if some god were at the helm, moves in a cycle through good and evil alternately for all time. So the strangeness is not that some unforeseen event takes place, but that not everything is unpredictable. This is also a good reason for admitting the claim of history, for in the inconstancy and irregularity of events history furnishes a corrective to both the arrogance of the fortunate and the despair of the destitute.

Here for the first time Fortune, or chance, is set at the centre of history, and for the first time Tolstoy's great truth is formulated, that the lesson of history is the denial of historical causation.

Under the veneer

By Ruth Dudley Edwards

GEORGE HARDINGE (Editor):
Winter's Crimes 13

224pp. Macmillan. £5.50.
0 333 31831 5

This series goes from strength to strength, rendering volume-by-volume comparisons inappropriate. (They are antipathetic anyway to the spirit of crime compendia.) Moreover, there is not one disappointing story among the eleven in this, the thirteenth anthology, so comparisons of quality within it would also be improper: it serves no useful purpose to set against H. R. F. Keating's gentle, humorous tale of naughty doings in the newspaper obituary department Miles Tripp's terrifying semi-supernatural tale of the consequences of visitations by a dead dog.

In fact the range of the volume causes problems for the reader bent on taking it at a sitting. A few of the stories are suitable for late night reading. Colin Dexter's deliciously twisted tale of confidence tricksters, and another of E. L. Rieu's enchanting pieces of historical detection, will interfere with no one's sleep. By contrast, James McClure, in his agonizing evocation of a frightened and

hate-filled paralysed girl, promises, like Miles Tripp, an uneasy night for all but the very hard-boiled.

Then there are the appalling marriages - unwise reading at a time of domestic disharmony: it is hard to decide whether John Wainwright's monstrous egotist is more or less nasty a husband than Margaret York's vicious brute. Elizabeth Ferrars and Lionel Davidson sink different exploratory shafts into the evil that can lurk under the most respectable veneer. How, after these stories, to look other than distrustfully at one's best friends and neighbours? It is almost a relief to turn to Desmond Lowden's simple villain doing his corpse-disposing job as best he can, or to Jennie Melville's sympathetic tale of mental illness.

There is something here for everyone disposed to respect the impossibility in a review of saying more than this about any short crime story before the reader settles down to it. But where to settle down? The collection should be read at a time of careful choosing. It is made for daylight. The fears it raises about human nature should be dispelled by the *bonhomie* of the present season, the terror of the most macabre stories dispelled by the afternoon's old movies. And at the end of the day one would be left with the pleasant certainty that the short crime story is alive, well and in capable hands.

Criminal proceedings

By T. J. Binyon

DICK FRANCIS:

Twice Shy
249pp. Michael Joseph. £6.95.
0 7181 2056 6

Schoolmaster Jonathan Darry, who often shoots at Elsie and her mother the Olympic team, finds himself by accident in possession of three mysterious computer tapes which are being looked for by some exceedingly rough and easy individuals.

As might be expected with Dick Francis, horses eventually turn out to be at the bottom of it all, but their physical presence is not so noticeable as usual. We are given a simple course in computing, the narration is as marvelously fluent as ever, and the depiction of the psychopaths is as painfully convincing. But the author's decision to break the book into the middle, virtually turning it into two longish short stories, seems a mistake.

MAGDALENA NABE:

Death of an Englishman
172pp. Collins. £6.25.
0 00 231298 0

Crusty English bachelor with suspicious habits is found dead in his ground-floor flat in Florence. Though almost incapacitated with influenza, and longing to get home to Sicily for Christmas, the local Carabinieri Marshal investigates, assisted by an ingenious police cadet and, as far as emotional differences will allow, two detectives from Scotland Yard. Italy is, inexplicably, where it is at; detective story-wise, at the moment, and this is certainly a worthy addition to the corpus. Well plotted and well written, with an affectionate look at Florence and its inhabitants, it is a more than sparkling debut.

MICHAEL KENYON:

Zigzag
218pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 00 23181 0

Chief Inspector Henry Packover, policeman and cockney postmaster, is sent to Dublin to pick up a prisoner - a stockbroker who has kidnapped his own daughter. But the prisoner

evades his clutches and Packover remains unwillingly in Dublin, where he is enlisted in a crusade to stem the flood of pornography that is threatening to leave the Emerald Isle some six feet deep in the magazines *Lip*, *Limb* and *Horn* and to blue films such as *Bohngate* in *Bollywood* (ie US *Rub-a-Dub Tub Tricky*) or *College Coeds* (in US *Graduation Girls*). Hilarious humour adorns a plot that grips like a clothespeg.

ELIZABETH FERRARS:

Thinner Than Water
182pp. Collins. £6.25.
0 00 231895 4

We have met Virginia Freer and her charming but delinquent ex-husband Felix before in Elizabeth Ferrars's novels. Here they are - somewhat tactlessly - invited to witness a friend's second wedding, as they had earlier witnessed the first. However, when the reception ends with the discovery of a corpse, and further events rapidly begin to prove the truth of the title, their presence turns out to be useful, as Felix unravels the problem before the police. Pleasant and undemanding tale, easily and professionally fitted together.

MICHAEL DELAHAYE:

The Sale of Lot 236
228pp. Constable. £6.95.
0 09 464270 2

English fresco expert working in Florence and blackmailed by a gang of Italian droogs into helping them look for a unknown crucifixion by Cimabue. Synopsis doesn't sound too promising, but Michael Delahaye nevertheless has made a brilliant start with his first novel. The plot is as thick as mistletoe and as tangled as a plateful of spaghetti; narration is accomplished neatly and deftly; the whole spiced with some delightfully fascinating information on medieval Italian art, and on how best to remove a fresco from the wall of your local church.

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to the editor

Railway Timetables

Sir, - I hesitate to ask for further space in your columns but so great is the volume of correspondence which arrives daily from railway travellers and readers of railway timetables that I am persuaded that I must do so.

It appears that those of your readers intending to travel to La Tour de Carol-Envelly by the *Catol-Talgo* may have been misled not only by a sentence in my review (October 23) of *British Rail's Continental Timetable* (Summer 1981), but also by my letter of clarification (November 6), which has made matters worse.

To start with, there is the question of the station's name. My correspondents (but not *The Times Atlas*, which does not mention the place) tell me that Latour-de-Carol, as they write it, and Envelly (not Envelly, as misspelled in my letter, though not, fortunately, in my review) are separate villages, some two kilometres apart. The Gare Internationale is between them. Cook's *Continental Timetable* gives the station's name as Latour-de-Carol but British Rail calls it La Tour de Carol-Envelly. Passengers for this station should evidently be prepared for argument when they attempt to identify their destination to the booking-clerk.

Luckily, it is almost impossible for them to miss the station altogether - and this brings me to the second point. Not only does the Paris-Alicante service fail to "rush straight through", since La Tour de Carol-Envelly is not on that line at all, but the line which does serve this station marks the end of the French standard-gauge track and the beginning of the Spanish broad-gauge track (or vice versa, depending on your direction), so that all passengers must alight here to change trains.

Furthermore, La Tour de Carol-Envelly is the terminus for a third line, a narrow-gauge track, winding through the French part of that area known as the Cerdagne (in Spanish, Cerdania; in Catalan, Cerdanya), over the Col de la Perche down to Villefrance-de-Conflent, where it connects with a standard-gauge branch line from Perpignan. (British Rail gives none of these details and is indebted to Mr de Paris of Dorset for this information.) Passengers who may find themselves lingering hesitatingly at La Tour de Carol-Envelly may therefore pass the time by contemplating three gauges of track lying side by side.

Last, the remark in my letter that the *Continental* for London was the *Continental* (I was misled by British Rail's decision to omit the word "Continental" from the title of the train) was in fact true: but I dared to suppose, (or would have dared, had I then known how many letters, postcards, telegrams and telephone calls my observation would attract) that the Cerdagne does boast a virtually autonomous town, Spanish but entirely surrounded by French territory, and connected to the rest of Spain by a "neutral" road.

My correspondents tell me that the Cerdagne is the only wide, high valley in the Pyrenees, with remarkably beautiful scenery and many lovely churches, often furnished with carved wooden figures. The floor of the valley is four thousand feet above sea level and the air fresh and invigorating. I will not take up more of your space by quoting the extracts from French, Spanish, and Catalan poetry with which my correspondents illustrate their letters, nor by attaching any of the photographs, sketches and watercolours they append, but it is clear from the enthusiasm and passionate exuberance with which they write that La Tour de Carol-Envelly must exert an extraordinarily beneficial influence.

May I suggest that some department of the TSS set about organizing a special excursion to La Tour de Carol-Envelly to reintegrate ex-

hausted readers and contributors? British Rail might be persuaded to devise an Awayday, in collaboration with French and Spanish National Railways, to mark the end of your distinguished time as editor. We might toast you where there is a wineglass symbol (buffet service of drinks and cold snacks) and make speeches after knives and forks in squares (tray meals).

JANET MOROAN.
Home Close, Elsfield, Oxfordshire.

'The Bookshops of London'

Sir, - Ronald Gray's letter (November 27) might give the impression that our recently published book, *The Bookshops of London*, by Martha Redding Pease, complains of the paucity of bookshops in the capital. I wonder if Mr Gray has seen the book - or only Lindsay Duguid's review of it (November 13). That review, quite legitimately, took the opportunity of discussing the availability of books in London, but such questions arise from, and not in, Mr Pease's book. The letter is strictly a guide to London bookshops, and expresses no views on their scarcity. It does, however, track down nearly 500 of them, and I doubt if the addition of "mail-order and by appointment" outlets, as recommended by Mr Gray, would make the book "several times as big". If Mr Gray is right the result would be rather unwieldy, since *The Bookshops of London* is already 390 pages long.

MICHAEL MASON.
Junctioe Books Limited, 15 St John's Hill, London SW11 1TN.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie

Sir, - A belated footnote to Claire Tomalin's review of Winifred Gerin's *Anne Thackeray Ritchie* (July 10): A. C. Gordon's somewhat obscurely published memoir of the Victorian headmaster and classicist William Gordon McCabe (1841-1920) contains dozens of letters from Anne Thackeray which, so far as I can tell, have not been referred to by her biographers and critics. It might therefore be worth pointing out that her last novel, *Mrs Dymally* (1885), which your reviewer and Mrs Gerin agree in considering undoubtedly her finest, may owe some of its merits to McCabe. He revised the book in manuscript - it was "banded over to me to wreak my own sweet will upon" as he put it. In a letter to R. A. Austen-Lough (see A. C. Gordon's *Memoirs and Memorials of William Gordon McCabe* [1925], vol 2, p 240-1) - and would have been just too reader to supply a touch of that school discipline which is so seldom found in Anne Thackeray's works.

IAN JACKSON.
PO Box 9075, Berkeley, California 94709.
The first prize in the 1981 National Poetry Championship, organized by the Poetry Society in association with BBC Radio 3, was awarded to James Berry for his poem "Fantasy of an African Boy". The second prize went to Pamula Gillman for "Journey" and the third to Paul Groves for "Anniversary Soak". These, and other prize-winning poems, will be published in the mid-January issue of *Poetry Review*.

To all American readers and subscribers
If you have any difficulties concerning your subscription to or the distribution of the TJS in the United States, please get in touch with Ms Nora Mingo at British Inc., 201 East 42nd Street, New York 10017, telephone (212) 966 9230.

The Identity of B. Traven

Sir, - Savkar Altinel (December 18) perpetrates at the same time an unnecessary complication and an unjustified simplification of the mystery of the writer B. Traven in the review of his novel *The Corveto* - which was incidentally first published in this country as long ago as 1936.

It is misleading to say that Will Wyatt and his BBC researchers have been "able to identify him as one Otto Wienecke, who had an earlier career as an actor and anarchist in Germany under the name of 'Rot Maru' before leaving Europe for good in the 1920s to start a new life as a novelist on the other side of the Atlantic". The surname of the real person whom Wyatt has identified with both Maru and Traven is actually Felge, since his father Adolf Felge married his mother Homina Wienecke a few months after his birth. He was always called Otto Felge, and used his mother's maiden name only later as one of his many pseudonyms.

On the other hand, it should be said that, despite the brilliant investigations of Wyatt and his colleagues (and their predecessors), there is still no conclusive proof of the multiple identification, and that there are still awkward gaps between the disappearance of Felge in 1904 and the appearance of Maru in 1907 and between the disappearance of Maru in 1924 and the appearance of Traven in Mexico in 1925. Perhaps something more definite will emerge in time for the centenary of his birth on February 23, 1982, but it seems unlikely.

NICOLAS WALTER.
134 Northumberland Road, Harrow, Middlesex.

Take me to your reader

By Bill Buford

The Arts Council announced last week that its grant for the forthcoming year would be increased by seven per cent, from £2.5 million to £2.6 million. While this is less than was hoped for, the Council reported that by making a number of cuts in its own administration, it should be able to sustain most of its major financial commitments. At a time when virtually every subsidized institution is desperately trying to accommodate cuts in government spending, the arts in general have somehow managed to pull through once again.

In literature, the case is a little different; indeed, ostensibly quite a bit better. There is actually more money to spend. Or, at least, there seems to be. The allocation for the Literature Panel next year will actually be only two and a quarter per cent greater than what it had for 1981/82. But this percentage fails to represent how much money the Panel will have to work with; largely because of the increase of funds made available by the two major cuts proposed for the new financial year: to the New Fiction Society (saving around £40,000) and to the library subscription scheme for literary magazines (saving around £40,000 to £50,000).

It is ironic that both projects are being cut when in principle both are so consistent with the new policy to which the Panel is now committed: to help readers instead of writers, in an attempt to make literature available to the largest possible audience. That commitment is "really not so different from the original aim of the New Fiction Society, which was to locate a readership interested in contemporary imaginative prose. Unfor-

VALERIE ADAMS is a lecturer in English at University College London.

JOHN BAVLEY is Warton Professor of English at the University of Oxford. His *Shakespeare and Tragedy* was published last year.

BILL BUFORD is co-editor of *Granta*.

J. A. BURGESS is the author of *Medieval Writers and their Work* which will be published shortly.

TIMOTHY D'ARCH SMITH is an antiquarian bookseller in London.

J. DAVIS is Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent. He is the author of *People of the Mediterranean*, 1977.

MARTIN DOWNSWORTH is a lecturer in English at Royal Holloway College, London.

RICHARD EBERHART's most recent collection of poems *Ways of Light* was published in 1980.

GAVIN EWART's *The Collected Ewart 1933-1980* was published last year.

RONALD FAUX is *The Times* correspondent in Scotland.

SIR HAROLD HOBBSON is an Honorary Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford.

HENRY KAMEN is the author of *The Spanish Inquisition, 1565, and The Iron Century: Social Change in Europe 1516-1660*, 1971.

H. G. KOENIGSBERGER's books include *Estates and Revolutions* and *The Habsburgs and Europe 1516-1660*, both 1971.

STEPHEN KOSK's books include *Asquith*, 1978.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE's books include *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy*, 1959. His translation of Homer's *Odyssey* was published in 1968.

NICOLAS WALTER.

JOHN BAVLEY is Warton Professor of English at the University of Oxford. His *Shakespeare and Tragedy* was published last year.

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LUCY MICKLETHWAIT is the co-author of *A Dictionary of British Book Illustration*, of which Volume One will be published later this year.

OSWYN MURRAY is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. He is the author of *Early Greece*, 1980.

REOMONU O'HANLON has recently completed a study of Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin.

VIVIAN SALMON's books include *The Study of Language in 17th-Century England*, 1979.

ROGER SCRUTON is the author of *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, 1979.

T. A. SHIFFEY's books include a study of *Beowulf*, 1979. He is Professor of English Language at the University of Leeds.

R. C. SIMMONS is Reader in American History at the University of Birmingham.

C. H. SISSON's translation of *The Divine Comedy* was published in 1980.

STUART SUTHERLAND is Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Sussex.

ANTHONY THWAITE's most recent collection of poems is *Victorian Voices*, 1980.

J. C. TREWIN's books include *Going to Shakespeare*, 1978, and *The Edwardian Theatre*, 1980.

FRANK TUOHY's collection of short stories *Live Bolt* was published in 1978.

KEITH WALKER is a lecturer in English at University College London.

J. G. WEDDINGTON is the author of *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, 1973.

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Time-travelling

By Lindsay Duguid

DIANA NORMAN:

King of the Last Days
189pp. Hodder and Stoughton.
£5.95.
0 340 27039 X

King of the Last Days, a sequel to *Fitzgibbon's Last*, is the story of a peasant monk from Glendunbury, a well-connected priest from Northfordshire and a crusader knight who take King Arthur's sword Excalibur across France to the dying Henry II. The three travellers dodge armies, foil thieves intent on stealing the relic and learn to feed for themselves in hostile country. With each stage of their journey they achieve new insight and wisdom, and their endeavour - undertaken with "the lunatic singleness of purpose which God gives to saints and martyrs" - yields a picture of the age, a mosaic of religious ideas and superstitions. Incidental characters such as William the Marshall and Gerald of Wales,

and contemporary attitudes - "People still disappeared in the forest never to be found, or they altered shape to become wolves (*loup-garous*), stags and foxes, or became mysteriously pregnant, or older, or younger" - are treated with a kind of ironic gravity, and the less purely historical themes of equality, justice and the futility of suffering give the story seriousness of purpose. Diana Norman's decision to have her characters speak in plain modern English adds greatly to the success of the narrative. She moves easily between informing and entertaining, concealing hindsight and presenting moral dilemmas as they occur. It would be a pity if the lurid end ill-drawn dust jacket provided by the publishers deterred potential readers of this excellent novel.

DEREK WILSON:

Bear Rampant
236pp. Hamish Hamilton. £5.95.
0 241 10147 6

Bear Rampant, the second volume of the "autobiography" of Robert Dud-

ley, covers the years from 1598 to 1603, resuming the account begun in *Bear's Whelp*. The book recounts the swashbuckling adventures of the Earl of Leicester, who, perhaps because this is a first-person narrative, is presented as a paragon of courage, good-sense and chastity. In the period covered by the book, Sir Robert finds favour first with Elizabeth and then with James I. He avoids being embroiled in the intrigues of the Earl of Essex while remaining loyal to his friend and patron. He marries the shy Alice, cements his friendship with Thomas Howard and leads successful expeditions to the West Indies and to Ireland (where he takes Tyrone prisoner) in his ship *The Bear*.

Derek Wilson's prose style mirrors the plain virtuosity of his subject. He is not particularly strong on characterization and is at a loss in emotional scenes, but he has a brisk way with a naval battle and his gusto in piloting on dramatic events - mutiny, shipwreck, fights with the natives, horrendous wounds - make up for the lack of sophistication. The prologue to *Bear Rampant* has Robert Dudley looking back on his English adventures from a Florantine pleasure garden, so presumably a further instalment is due.

PHILIPPA WIAT:

A Wordsworthian self-apostrophe from the fourth floor of the Hotel Admiral (Copenhagen)

Relax. Relax. It's 8 o'clock. The gulls patrol the harbour. It's a perfect Danish winter morning. A man is fooling about with a snow-machine, a brush that whirrs a pathway on the quay. A little snow-blizzard looks to be blowing, but you're inside and warm; with loved ones far away, Margo, Jane, Julian, the family names - Victorian sentimentality, but still are loved ones and absence makes the heart grow fonder, though some say out of sight is out of mind. Wordsworthian thought! And soppy Richard Jefferies prosed of the fine physiques of "dearest Greece" (*The Story Of My Heart*, your journey book).

Relax. Relax. The gulls float by the window. So much of life is so repetitive. Breakfast comes up, five kinds of bread and coffee. The roll is hundreds-and-thousands in caraway seeds - I love the little buggers - remember what Churchill said when Admirals plonked Traditions of the Service. The joy of caraway seeds and coffee! And you reflect that this is a blue city and Wordsworth wouldn't have liked it. Apparently, the sex-shows need a hush, cathedral silence, solemn and complete - the man cannot maintain his proud erection in face of ribald cries, or shouts, or laughter.

Relax. Relax. Baby, it's cold outside! Life below freezing. The Danish word for scammers? Your nails need cutting. Such minutiae aren't part of the egotistical sublime - but they're important to the traveller. Long poems spread the inspiration thin like Danish butter on the varied bread.

And in the night a sucking great ship ties up (to use the language of sailors) - the *Prinsesse Margrethe* - perhaps about fifty yards from the hotel window. It looks bongo and reminds you of Nawahan.

"Hills that purify those who walk on them" I read in Jafferles. You might as well write: "ships that purify those who sail in them". The snow keeps up. You mean, keeps drifting down. All propositions are a wayward race.

Hot news comes in - a Right Wing coup in Spain. Young Wordsworth wouldn't have liked it, the old one wouldn't have cared. It makes you feel quite sick. You're back once more in 1936, and twenty years old, Spain, a Republic. You can't do much about it (you couldn't then). Proust didn't end upside down, like Musollini.

Abortive - comes the news. Long, sighed relief

Freedom a topless bar where tits are swinging - the bad regimes are bras to crowd them in.

Your Copenhagen Guide says "Topples Girls", with Spanking, Animal, Rubber, Urine, Chalna.

Jefferies gets better - on the Victorian vice of work and how many millions slave to keep alive - a kind of blue sky socialism. He didn't believe in God but neither did he credit Evolution. In ways, a Lawrence before his time - in 1883 the legs were limbs.

Oh, such limp verse could limp right on for ever - as Wordsworth might, garden pond up, mud down, to spout it all out to Dorothy, a kettle on the boil and the receptive, humble as the tea-pot, ready to write it down.

Relax. Yours is a smaller domestic brew. Drift lazy like the gulls. Sex, love and politics won't stop for you, an engine idling. Those gulls bring a message too; relax, relax.

23rd February-2nd March
revised 28th April, 1981

Gavin Ewart

Vatic vernacular

By Valerie Adams

ANTHONY S. G. EDWARDS (Editor)
Skelton
The Critical Heritage
224pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£10.50.
0 7100 0724 8

"The writers of literary histories", complained Richard Hughes in 1929, "have been content to repeat with surrogat-like persistence, one after the other, that Skelton was a witty but coarse satirist, having occasionally a certain rude charm, but in the main bungling...". This comment may serve as a not unfair summary of the opinions collected in this book, in spite of the frequency with which critics take earlier critics to task for being improperly equipped to appreciate Skelton.

Before Thomas Warton there is little of critical interest, and there is almost no critical approval until Southey's praise of Skelton's "perfect originality". A few Victorian writers, beginning with Isaac D'Israeli in 1840, are enthusiastic at some length, and in the 1920s and 1930s a group of poets including Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden announced the rediscovery of a poet previously thought too difficult. The final piece is from C. S. Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*.

In his Introduction, Anthony Edwards comments at length, and relevantly, on the growth of the Skelton "legend". Many of the critics in the book have not attended scrupulously to the distinction between fact and myth, speculation about the life having proved easier than evaluation of the works. The debonair practical joker of the *Merry Tales*, the learned courtier of Erasmus's compliments, the fearless attacker of Wolsey on the people's behalf, and the creator (or acquaintance) of Elton Rummage, combine to make an attractive persona and one whose credibility can be underlined by judicious quotation from the poems. The buffoon depicted by Ben Jonson in *The Fortunate Isles* becomes the impish cleric appreciated by the 1844 reviewer of Dyer's edition ("We only hope that he was not the father confessor of the fair Joanne Scroope"), the student of "the vernacular" imagined by a writer of 1866 as doing field-work in streets and markets, and the *vates* celebrated by Robert Graves.

Edwards sees criticism, for the purposes of this anthology, as an activity entirely separate from scholarship. "Speke Parrot" is no longer, in Lewis's words, "nonsense to us because it is a cryptogram of which we have lost the key", but the studies of William Nelson and E. L. R. Edwards are not represented here. The slightness of most of the comment that is included, and the general lack of interest in Skelton in the past - none of the great literary critics have thought him worth more than a passing mention - hardly support Edwards's view that Skelton's reputation is a rewarding subject for study.

Poetical Puritan

By R. C. Simmons

PETER WHITE
Benjamin Tompson, Colonial Bard
A Critical Edition
218pp. Pennsylvania State University Press.
£10.
0 271 00250 6

To describe Benjamin Tompson (1642-1714) as a "colonial bard, the singer of the American past" is not very helpful. His verses are unlyrical and his sense of New England's past is very different from that held by most of his contemporaries, second-generation American Puritans. Bards are also traditionally seen as purveyors of poetry in quantity, while Tompson's slender output comprises more than a quarter of the pages of this critical edition; introduction, notes, and other apparatus account for the rest.

Unlike the two best poets of Puritan New England, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, Tompson lacked an intense personal vision. He seems to have considered the ability to compose verse as a helpful recommendation for an educated but only marginally successful minister's son. His writings are largely topical and occasional.

Tompson's best-known pieces con-

"The libels of one age", says the 1844 reviewer defensively, "become valuable historical evidence to posterity." Not surprisingly, the nineteenth-century writers value the satires for the facts to be gleaned from them, and for their language, "the very vulgar tongue of the times". Pope's criticism of "Billingsgate language" is repeated in 1844 with approval: "good set Billingsgate". These critics admire "Skeltonic" verse as - again in the words of the 1844 reviewer - "inimitable doggerel". "Doggerel!" exclaims Humbert Wolfe in 1929, praising Skelton's mastery of prosody, as do the other poets. Auden, whose essay of 1935 is one of the few pieces of value here, has some perceptive paragraphs on stress-timed rhythm, but only C. S. Lewis seriously poses the question of how "Skeltonic" pleases.

The Victorian critics studied Dyer's scholarly apparatus with care. They shared his assumption that Skelton could expect few readers, and they provide a variety of illustrative quotations. Several of the twentieth-century writers express scorn for the "antiquarians". Blunden and Graves see Dyer's edition as unsuitable for the layman; in consequence their essays, too, read like advertisements for Skelton. (Quotations from the poems are generally not given in the book: line numbers from Dyer are substituted, and this makes for considerable inconvenience in reading.) "Speke Parrot", almost unnoticed in the nineteenth century and before, is now singled out for admiration. Its obscurity is acknowledged, but brushed aside: "as all great poetry must", says Hughes, "it baffles eulogy". Again, only Lewis, in this book, is prepared to admit the problem: "Our pleasure in it may be almost wholly foreign to Skelton's purpose and to his actual achievement in 1521."

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cern the Indian war which devastated large areas of New England in 1675-76; humour at the expense of his contemporaries as well as interesting portraits of the Indians assure readability and they have often been anthologized. Many of his other shorter pieces are funeral elegies and are typical of this genre of Puritan verse. Like most New Englanders, he seems to have eschewed love poetry, the sonnet, lyricism, the pastoral - and, simply, public and private morality. Public and private morality, godly New Englanders are his subject-matter and a beeping-up of biblical and classical allusion (beloved of many New Englanders even when it had become old-fashioned in the mother country) is fully evident.

His editor, Peter White, is a meticulous and knowledgeable guide to Tompson's personal history, to the texts of Tompson's poems, and to the minutiae of scholarship. He is sensible if, usually, conventional things to say about the general New England context. Possibly a lack of information precluded any real discussion either of the economics of publishing in Tompson's time and its influence on subject-matter or of the poetical influences on him. There are both topics that might bear investigation. Moses Cofl-Tyler's investigation of the lighter tone and more cutting edge of some of Tompson's verse, derived from his reading of Dryden is quoted but not discussed.

The interests of the patient

By Galen Strawson

STEPHEN TROMBLEY:

"All that Summer She was Mad"
Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors
348pp. Junction Books. £9.95.
0 85245 039 X

"The mind having once acquired a bias is very ready to accept as evidence all that agrees with this, and to reject what may be in opposition to the favourite idea." Thus Sir George Savage, one of Virginia Woolf's doctors, writing in 1891. The thought was hardly a novel one then, and is as true today as ever. In the course of his historically and linguistically insensitive discussion of Savage's (admittedly unimpressive and unattractive) theoretical writings, Stephen Trombley condemns him for his failure to apply this "revolutionary critique" in his own work. But Dr Trombley's own book, *All that Summer She was Mad: Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors*, is itself a fine example of the phenomenon in question; both in the way that it selects its evidence, and in the way that it misreads and distorts what it selects. It provides yet more support for F.H. Bradley's already catastrophically well-sounded view on the danger of theoretical reflection: "We reflect in general not to find the facts, but to prove our theories at the expense of them."

Distortive theories can be of value: the facts are ingeniously and pertinaciously sifted in support of a novel and eccentric position which, while being finally unacceptable - for one single strand of the truth is presented as if it were the whole truth - none the less serves to increase our understanding of the whole, by shifting the distribution of the existing interpretative stresses. It is a most insensitive work. It is not so much a question of intellectual failure - though the level of scholarship is low by any ordinary standard - as of a failure of sensibility.

What then is Trombley's theory? There is in fact nothing really worthy of the name in his book. Rather, there is a general attitude of hostility towards Leonard Woolf, and, to a lesser extent, towards Virginia Woolf's biographer Quentin Bell. It is suggested, or implied, more or less directly, that Leonard Woolf was (al- ways) unsympathetic to his wife, and insensitive in her regard; that they were not happy together; and that Quentin Bell and almost all those who knew the couple were wrong about this. We are told that the "image of Virginia as a bedridden lunatic is one that ought to be dispelled"; though we are not told either who promulgates or who possesses such an image - doubtless all will agree with the claim, though few of those who have read much about Virginia Woolf will recognize the miserable victim of incomprehension that Trombley presents us with. Finally, the use of the word "mad" in connection with Virginia Woolf is objected to. Trombley claims that it is wrong to say that Virginia Woolf was - ever - mad; although in fact he does so more than once himself.

Here then are some fairly palpable claims. The subtitle of the book, *Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors*, holds promise of some more substantial theory. But the discussions of the work of Sir George Savage, Sir Henry Head, Sir Maurice Craig and T. B. Hyslop have really very little to do with Virginia Woolf. If they have any bearing on her case, and on the rights and wrongs of how she was treated when unwell, it is principally in two ways, of which the first is this: they show that Vanessa and Clive Bell and Leonard Woolf acted in accord with the views of the most respected doctors of the day - regarding treatment, at least - in sending Virginia to nursing homes and prescribing enforced rest, lots of food, absence of intellectual stimulation, and so on, when she was unwell.

Trombley claims Virginia "had every reason to feel... that she was the victim of a conspiracy" of such

times. This is of course false if it is taken in the most natural way to mean that she was in fact the victim of a (malevolent) conspiracy against her; what is true is merely that it is not surprising that this is how the behaviour of those close to her sometimes appeared to her when (and given that) she was unwell - as doctors were consulted, discussions were held, and it was agreed that she should go to the nursing home. Trombley sometimes writes as if Virginia's dislike of being confined to nursing homes were itself clear evidence that it was the wrong treatment, and as if Leonard and the others were demonstrably not trying to do what they would have agreed, when they knew she disliked it.

It is true that, with the exception of Sir Henry Head, the writings of the doctors, and those of Sir Maurice Craig and T. B. Hyslop in particular, make sobering and sometimes sinister reading. But although they are of interest in their own right, they contribute almost nothing to the understanding of Virginia Woolf's periods of madness. Obviously, it was the doctors' practical recommendations about treatment that mattered most to her, and these, whatever their theoretical underpinnings, were mostly pretty straightforward. Their theories are, however, relevant in a second way, a way which Trombley touches on, but does not adequately develop: Virginia doubtless knew something of the general drift of her doctor's attitude to mental disorders; she doubtless felt - rightly - that they tended to treat mental illness too much like physical illness, and again rightly - that they took far too little account, in their assessments of her condition, of the role of such things as her feelings of guilt about various matters. Bell writes of Virginia's belief that "there was nothing wrong with her, that her anxieties and insomnia were due simply to her own faults, faults which she ought to overcome without medical assistance". Virginia would of course have been right to suppose that rest, food and quiet would not cure her, by riding her permanently of these sources of affliction. She may well have felt that to insist on these things was simply to misunderstand her problem; and the sense of being misunderstood would have been a further source of misery to her (misery aggravated by the frustration of knowing that her views would not be given due weight precisely because she was already unwell). It may possibly have contributed to her despair on the day when she attempted suicide in September 1913, shortly after having seen Doctors Wright and Head.

This, then, is a point worth making.

At the fact of our own murder Everything in our mind goes white. We lean over the corpse with our names Fumbling at their scarves, their turned-out pockets, That scrap of paper with the telephone numbers And we can never say anything. And when later we withdraw To another room, for coffee, perhaps, or to hold One jumpy cigarette in the air for company, We can't stop talking, we talk wildly, But we know really We are silent and alone Staring back into our own dead eyes Peeling the weight of our own dead hands Over our mouths Like stones... My friend, I say, My friend, you say, Such a simple word... how many years ago We burnt it to an illogible coil And threw it away.

It is worth considering Trombley's discussion of the decision taken in 1912 not to have children - if only because it is the only point at which Hyslop enters the story. Trombley, joining forces with Roger Poole, treats this as an occasion to attack Leonard, and to disagree with Quen-

tin Bell, who states his opinion that the decision was the right one. Trombley quotes Poole's interpretation of a passage in Leonard Woolf's diary. This is the passage: I went and consulted Sir George Savage: he brushed my doubts aside. But now my doubts about Sir George Savage were added to my doubts about Virginia's health. There seemed to be more of the man of the world ("Do her a world of good, my dear fellow; do her a world of good!") in his opinion than of the mental specialist. So I went off and consulted two other well known doctors, Maurice Craig, and T. B. Hyslop, and also the lady who ran the mental nursing home where Virginia had several times stayed. They confirmed my fears and were strongly against her having children. This is Poole's interpretation of Woolf.

Leonard lost confidence in Sir George Savage when Savage insisted that having children would do Virginia a "world of good". "So I went off and consulted two other well known doctors..." The "so" has a logical force here. Since Savage said that having children would do Virginia good, so I went to get opinions contrary to his.

Is this interpretation justified? A first point is this: it was Savage's breezy "man of the world" attitude to the problem that moved Leonard to consult other doctors than Savage, who was presumably consulted first simply because he had treated Virginia before: it is these two things that are connected by "so". Second, and relatedly, it is surely important that Savage was in 1912 seven years old, likely to appear a man of old-fashioned ideas in Leonard's ears, and one whose dismissively sanguine attitude could not inspire full confidence. It is entirely understandable that he was insufficiently reassured by Savage, and took the step of seeking further advice from two other eminent doctors - both of whom, it is worth remarking, were more than twenty years younger than Savage. And it is quite clear that he himself here calls Virginia's madness, as a theoretician, Hyslop is only very indirectly relevant, just in so far as he earns a place in a study of the careers of the medical profession in England in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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indeed, given the evidence, though responsibly; so also is Trombley's uncritical endorsement of it.

So much for the doctors. What about Trombley's views on madness? One of his problems with the word "madness" is that it tends to treat it as an all-or-nothing matter: he appears to think that one must either attribute Virginia's breakdowns to "some inherent madness", conceived as a permanent condition, or deny that she was ever mad at all. The same sort of reasoning appears to be this: if things ever went badly between them, if there were any respects in which their marriage was not a success (sexually, for example) then it was not and never a success at all. Given his tendency to regiment everything in such simple terms (his doing so is no doubt partly explained by his polemical aims), Trombley is very ill suited to discussing the life of a woman who underwent enormous changes; who suffered periods of complete breakdown, and yet was, at other times, in her own words "a great amateur of the art of life", and a very successful one, capable of great kindness and serene assurance, of infectious good humour and liveliness; and who at the same time could feel deeply insecure, and speak very maliciously of others, and be again in her own words "oddly vehement, and very exacting, and so difficult to live with and so very intemperate and changeable".

If Trombley denies that Virginia Woolf was mad, what does he grant? That she was "at various periods in her life, distressed to such an extent that she could not work, could not concentrate - indeed, on occasion she lost the will to live". The objection is only to the notion of "inherent madness". But this is very vague; and it is not clear to whom the objection is correctly made. It is true that Bell, discussing Virginia's instability, develops the image of a "cancer of the mind... always working away somewhere, always in suspense", but here he is intent on dramatizing her fear of going mad again, comparing it explicitly with the fear of one who has had a physical cancer, and knows that it may return - who knows the *pre-disposition* is there. He is characterizing the terror of losing control - "I feel certain I am going mad again... I can't fight any longer", she wrote in 1941: to say that someone has to live with this terror is not to speak of "inherent madness", or if it is, then to speak of inherent madness is correct, in Virginia Woolf's case.

At the outset of the book, Trombley states that "in this work, Virginia's breakdowns will be considered in the context of the pressures which bore upon her at the time - entirely proper, but hardly original. In his conclusion, he speaks of the battle lines having been drawn; he, presumably, is on one side, "Leonard and Professor Bell" are on the other. But in the end his fuss about the word "mad" leads him to no reasoned or plausible conclusion with which they would disagree. And confidence in Trombley's views about when judgements of madness or of mental disorder are appropriate - together with confidence in his scholarship - must be considerably shaken by the following way in which he accommodates facts - in this case "facts" - to pre-petified theory.

Virginia's brother Thoby died on November 20, 1906. Trombley has this to say:

The extent of the immediate shock of Thoby's death is touchingly revealed in three letters to Violet Dickinson, written between 237 and 307 November. To them, Virginia adheres to a fantasy in which Thoby is still alive. It would be wrong to interpret these fantasies as evidence of an unhinged mind. What they do represent is

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